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Pepperdine University
Graduate School of Education and Psychology

Student-Led Conferences: Perceptions Held By Parents of Children Attending a
Christian Elementary School

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership, Administration and Policy

by

Angele' Foster King

May, 2011

Linda Purrington, Ed.D.- Dissertation Chairperson

This dissertation, written by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES	vii
DEDICATION	ix
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	x
VITAE	xi
ABSTRACT	xii
Chapter 1: Focus and Purpose of the Study.....	1
Background.....	1
Statement of the Problem	9
Purpose of the Study	9
Research Questions	11
Importance of the Study.....	12
Limitations.....	14
Assumptions	15
Organization of the Study	17
Chapter 2: Literature Review	20
Introduction.....	20
Marzano Factors that Influence Student Performance/Achievement That Can Be Addressed by Schools and School Leaders	22
Marzano Student Factors that Influence Student Achievement	25
Strategies for Positively Addressing Student Factors	28
Parent-Teacher School Conferences.....	36
Student-led Conferences as a Strategy for Addressing Home Atmosphere, Intelligence, Background, and Motivation Factors	39
What is a Student-Led Conference?	41
Parental Involvement/Awareness	48
Student Accountability	57
Empirical Research in Support of Student-Led Conferences.....	61
Benefits Provided by Student-Led Conferences	68
Challenges Brought About by Student-Led Conferences	75
Summary	76
Chapter 3: Methods	79
Overview.....	79
Research Questions	79
Research Design Overview	80

	Page
Sampling Method and Sample Participants	83
Human Subjects Considerations.....	84
Instrumentation.....	86
Validity and Trustworthiness.....	90
Data Collection Setting and Procedures	94
Data Analysis.....	96
Summary	98
Chapter 4: Results of the Study.....	99
Restatement of the Purpose of the Study	99
Restatement of Research Questions	99
Review of Research Design.....	100
Research Question 1 Findings.....	101
Research Question 2 Findings.....	118
Research Question 3 Findings.....	128
Summary of Findings.....	138
Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations	143
Discussion of Findings	145
Conclusions	151
Recommendations for Policy, Practice, and Further Research.....	153
Chapter Summary.....	157
REFERENCES	162
APPENDIX A: Revised Student-led Conference Parent Survey.....	169
APPENDIX B: Student-led Conference Parent Questionnaire	173
APPENDIX C: Possible Follow-Up Questions	176
APPENDIX D: Principal's Permission Request to Conduct Study	177
APPENDIX E: Professional Practitioner Student-led Conference Survey and Questionnaire Feedback	178
APPENDIX F: Pilot Student-led Conference Survey and Questionnaire Feedback	180
APPENDIX G: Parent Thank You.....	182
APPENDIX H: Student Thank You Gift.....	183
APPENDIX I: Principal's Signed Permission to Conduct Study	184
APPENDIX J: Letter to Classroom Teachers.....	185

	Page
APPENDIX K: DRAFT Principal's Follow Up Letter.....	186
APPENDIX L: Principal Thank You	187
APPENDIX M: Initial Student-led Conference Parent Survey.....	188
APPENDIX N: Parent Informed Consent Letter.....	192

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1. Research Literature Sources for Structured Survey Statements	87
Table 2. Research Literature Sources for Semi-Structured Questionnaire Questions.....	89
Table 3. Semi-structured Follow-up Interview Questions/Statements	90
Table 4. Summary of Parent Survey Respondents.....	101
Table 5. Statement 1 Responses	102
Table 6. Statement 2 Responses	103
Table 7. Statement 3 Responses	105
Table 8. Statement 4 Responses	106
Table 9. Statement 5 Responses	107
Table 10. Statement 6 Responses	109
Table 11. Statement 7 Responses	110
Table 12. Statement 8 Responses	111
Table 13. Statement 9 Responses	112
Table 14. Statement 10 Responses	113
Table 15. Statement 11 Responses	114
Table 16. Statement 12 Responses	116
Table 17. Perceived Benefits of SLCs	117
Table 18. Summary of Question 2 Responses by Whole Group	119
Table 19. Summary of Question 2 Responses by Grade Level.....	119
Table 20. Question 2 Themes	120
Table 21. Summary of Question 3 Responses by Whole Group	122
Table 22. Summary of Question 3 Responses by Grade Level.....	123

	Page
Table 23. Question 3 Themes	123
Table 24. Summary of Question 4 Responses by Whole Group	125
Table 25. Summary of Question 4 Responses by Grade Level	126
Table 26. Question 4 Themes	126
Table 27. Summary of Question 1 Responses by Whole Group	129
Table 28. Summary of Question 1 Responses by Grade Level	130
Table 29. Question 1 Themes	130
Table 30. Summary of Question 5 Responses by Whole Group	132
Table 31. Summary of Question 5 Responses by Grade Level	133
Table 32. Question 5 Themes	133
Table 33. Summary of Question 6 Responses by Whole Group	135
Table 34. Summary of Question 6 Responses by Grade Level	136
Table 35. Question 6 Themes	136

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to:

My daughter Angelle, a shining star and my biggest cheerleader,

My mother Audrey, a constant supporter and believer,

and

My father Christopher, always there with words of encouragement

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My journey through the doctorate program has been a journey I never imagined I would take. It began as a mere thought one June afternoon which I quickly responded to. Within a short time I was entering my first class. This has been an interesting 3 year journey, and one that I am glad I took. It has been full of knowledge and personal insight. It has been a journey that I would not have wanted to take alone.

Thank you to Dr. Linda Purrington, my dissertation chair, for your endless academic advice, encouragement and the gift of never being too busy. To Dr. Robert Barner and Dr. Joan Millsbuffehr, I thank you for providing me with your expertise and being an understanding, willing committee.

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Last, but not least, thank you to Mr. Keith Lucas, principal at Ontario Christian Elementary School, for your assistance and cooperation, along with your willing staff and dedicated parents. Without them, this study would not have been possible.

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ABSTRACT

This concurrent multiple methods study was to inform the work at Ontario Christian School (OCS) related to student-led conferences in grades K-3rd during the 2009-2010 school year. OCS elementary parent perceptions were explored regarding the benefits, if any, of student-led conferences in addition to how, if at all, student-led conferences have influenced parent awareness of K-3rd student academic performance, communication between parents and students in regards to school, parental expectations and parenting style, as well as their influence on student motivation and accountability. Participating parents completed a quantitative survey and a qualitative questionnaire.

Five main findings resulted. First, the parents at OCS deemed student-led conferences as a beneficial practice at the school. Second, the number one perceived benefit was an increase in student self-pride and parents perceiving student-led conferences as helping students understand their academic achievements and the importance of self-evaluation. Third, student-led conferences resulted in academic discussions regarding school and they had a positive effect on parental expectations and parenting style. Fourth, parents at OCS viewed excitement and motivation as synonymous and this resulted in an extraordinary amount of student pride which increased student leadership skills and had a positive effect on their achievement and performance. Finally, the student pride gained was a key element that influenced student academic performance, motivation and achievement.

Three conclusions were drawn from this study.

1. Student-led conferences provide greater opportunity for three-way communication among students, parents, and teachers around students' learning and achievement.
2. Student-led conferences are means for OCS parents to take a more active role in their children's learning process and consequently parents are more likely to understand the academic needs of their children, what to expect academically, and how to support their learning.
3. Student-led conferences hold students more accountable for their learning which results in increased student motivation, responsible behavior, and greater pride in accomplishment.

Recommendations resulting from the study were to expand student-led conferences school wide, periodically evaluate their process, engage in grade level collaboration on the implementation process, evaluate academic data across the grade levels to ensure success, and strategically plan for future improvement.

Chapter 1: Focus and Purpose of the Study

Background

The educational system in the United States is currently in an era where society deems school, parent and student to be of utmost importance in increasing student achievement. The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 was a national education reform law that was implemented during the Bush administration and designed to raise academic achievement for all students and close the academic achievement gap between high achieving and under-achieving students by the 2014 school year (Peterson, 2005). NCLB mandated proficiency for all students in reading and math and required every student to show adequate yearly progress. Accountability for this law, in the form of high stakes testing, was quickly placed on schools and the educators therein. Educators are now being held accountable for the academic progress of their students, as well as for preparing students to become productive members in a democratic global society. High stakes testing has subsequently become an important academic measurement tool when evaluating student achievement.

There are multiple factors influencing student achievement that can be addressed and measured by educators. Robert Marzano (2003) provides a multiple factor model that categorizes factors influencing student achievement into three categories: school, teacher, and student. Marzano suggests that school factors influencing student achievement are the curriculum, the awareness that equal opportunities must be provided for all students to learn, and the fact that the school must provide students with feedback. Marzano

continues that it is essential for schools to place high expectations on students and schools must create opportunities for parent and community interaction, giving parents and community members an opportunity to be involved. Lastly in the school factor category, Marzano reports that the school atmosphere must be safe and there should be cohesiveness among the staff.

Teacher factors that influence student achievement represent the second category in Marzano's (2003) multiple factors model. Teacher-related factors that influence achievement include: providing teachers with the academic framework needed in order to create structured lessons. Teachers must have good classroom management skills, have a good rapport with the students, establish clear expectations, keep students engaged in the lessons, and provide opportunities for higher-level thinking.

Student factors that influence student achievement represent the third category in Marzano's (2003) multiple factors model. Student factors that influence student achievement are home environment, learned intelligence/background knowledge and motivation. Parents need to express daily interest in their child's schoolwork and communicate their expectations to their child. The more intelligence a student has, the greater the opportunity for academic achievement. A student's intelligence is thought to consist of two domains, knowledge and cognitive processes. In addition, students must have motivation and strive for success.

A student-led conference per Bailey and Guskey, 2001; Benson and Barnett, 1999, Flannery, 2004; Gismondi, 2009; Herbert, 2001; Krejci, 2002;

LeBlanc, 2000; Moore, 2003; Simon, 2001; Smith, 2008; and Stiggins, 2005 represents a potential strategy for promoting student motivation, responsibility, and achievement in addition to increasing parent awareness and the subsequent involvement of parents in supporting their children's learning. Student-led conferences are a significant change from traditional teacher-parent conferences in that student-led conferences provide opportunities for students to be active participants throughout the entire conferencing process. Students must be taught the art of self-evaluation of work completed in the class in order to provide parents with an overview of their academic strengths and weaknesses. The students must be comfortable with the process and procedures of implementing the conference and exude the communication skills necessary to engage in conversations revolving around schoolwork and be prepared to answer any questions that might arise. On the contrary, traditional parent-teacher conferences do not engage the students in the conferencing process. Once students complete the work accountability for the outcome is not placed on the students. They are not held accountable for understanding or explaining their strengths or weaknesses.

The term accountability is heard often in the field of education and currently discussed with parents in regards to their children at school conferences. However, parent-teacher conferences were not developed with student accountability in mind. Conferences were originally structured as a tool for disseminating information to parents about students. Traditionally, parent-teacher conferences have been just that – a conference between the parent and

the teacher – leaving out one important individual: the student. They are usually conducted twice a year and provide a chance for parents to meet their child's teachers and review any issues or concerns the parents or teachers may have with their child/student's performance (Hackmann, 1996).

Through the years, traditional parent teacher conferences have done little to guide parents and students in working together or help students become accountable for their academic progress. With traditional parent-teacher conference formats, the child was peripheral to the discussion, and the teacher held the position of power (Woodard, 1993). By excluding the student, the traditional parent-teacher conference leaves a gap between school and home (Hackmann, 1996). In recent years many educators have begun to question the effectiveness of the traditional parent-teacher conference. With the traditional parent-teacher conference format not only are students excluded from participating in the conferences, but also in many cases teachers specifically ask the parents not to bring their child. Instead of the students playing an intricate role in the conference they are left at home to anxiously await the return of their parents hoping they received good news from the teacher (Woodard, 1993).

Another type of conference currently bringing about concerns is the goal setting conference. Goal setting conferences are conferences where parents, teachers and students set goals for the students to accomplish throughout the year (Carr, 1981). During the conference the parent, teacher, and student conjointly decide on three goals that the student will work on throughout the school year. The subsequent conferences then revolve around these goals. In

goal setting conferences the student is involved, however, according to Idol-Maestas (1983), some school systems feel that this is not enough involvement on the student's part nor does it assist with parental awareness after the goals are met. As a result, student-led conferences are emerging as an alternative to goal setting conferences and traditional parent-teacher conferences (Hackmann, 1996).

Student-led conferencing involves having students conduct formal conferences with their parents or guests, displaying their schoolwork as well as discussing their learning, educational goals, and strategies for meeting those goals (Benson & Barnett, 2005). Student-led conferences give students an opportunity to review their own work and evaluate it. According to Hubert (1989), "The physical act of attaching meaning to a specific piece of work contributes significantly to the child's meta cognitive growth" (p. 30). With this in mind, having students review their own work and report to their parents about their progress could strengthen their chances for academic growth and create a more effective conferencing session.

A model for student-led conferences, pioneered by Little and Allan (1989) consists of three steps: preparation, implementation, and evaluation. Each step involves activities for the teacher, parents, and student. Student-led conferences require students to act as the leader of the meeting, thereby creating a nurturing environment in which they become excited about sharing their academic achievements and goals with their parents (LeCountryman & Schroeder, 2006; Tuinstra & Hiatt-Michael, 2004). Through the process of student-led

conferencing, students guide their parents through the necessary steps needed in order to provide them with a clear understanding of the academic progress they have made during the course of the term, as well as any progress they still need to make. This is accomplished by using graded work samples and demonstrating the acquired skills to the parents. Student-led conferencing shifts and redistributes the responsibility for directing the conference from the teacher and places it in the hands of the students.

Aware that both traditional parent-teacher conferences and goal setting conferences do not engage students in their academic development or encourage parental awareness, this researcher wondered if student-led conferences are a more effective way of including students in their own learning process, enabling them to deliver necessary information to their parents and thereby increasing parental awareness. Parental awareness is also currently viewed as a major concern within the United States educational system. Society believes that if parents are more aware of their child's strengths as well as weaknesses, parents in conjunction with the schools will provide the support that the children need. NCLB provides direct evidence that current levels of student achievement warrant concern. According to the Learning First Alliance (2003), student accountability and school accountability must go hand and hand in order for United States schools to achieve the results they are after. Kerr (2000), Lasky and Moore (2004), and Murphy (2000) concur with the National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education that parent awareness is a key to student success and must not be overlooked. The inclusion of parents in school

assessments of learning is one of the standards for assessment of reading and writing developed by the International Reading Association (IRA) and the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). In their rationale for this standard, the IRA and the NCTA (IRA/NCTA Joint Task Force on Assessment, 1994) assert that “in many schools, parents stand on the periphery of the school community, some feeling hopeless, helpless, and unwanted” (p. 37).

According to Benson and Barnett (2005), parents must become active participants in the assessment process in order to provide support for their children. Given the primary goal of communication, student-led conferences are an excellent way to communicate student achievement or performance (Bailey & Guskey, 2001). According to Bailey and Guskey, teachers with whom they have worked, report that parents who attend a student-led conference with the goal of picking up a report card often take only a cursory glance at the written report. They feel they learn much more about the student’s progress from the actual conference itself. Student-led conferences are a way for educators to help alleviate their concern of parents not being aware of their child’s academic standings and progress.

Another purpose of student-led conferences is to encourage students to accept responsibility for their academic progress and explain their academic performance to their parents. Students become responsible for working with teachers to identify their strengths and learning needs while collecting evidence over time to illustrate their progress. Student-led conferences help students to identify and understand their own strengths and areas for improvement, giving

them the opportunity to reflect on their own learning and development. In addition, student-led conferences encourage students to actively participate in the evaluation of their academic progress, which motivates students to think about and act on personal initiatives to improve learning (Guyton, 1989).

Hackmann (1996) concurred with Guyton that student-led conferences encourage students, parents, and teachers to openly communicate as equal partners. Furthermore, Hackmann noted that students report increased self-confidence in addition to personal satisfaction, by facilitating the conference while parents begin to appreciate the effectiveness of oral communication.

Ontario Christian School (OCS) is a kindergarten through eighth grade school located in Ontario, California. The school was founded in 1944. OCS has implemented mandatory student-led conferences in grades 7 and 8 for the past 10 years and optional student-led conferences in grades kindergarten through 6 for the past 5 years. During the 2009-2010 school year, all kindergarten through third grade classes implemented student-led conferences (K. Lucas, personal communication, September 2, 2010). The class size ranged from 20 to 21 students. Since student-led conferences had been implemented at OCS, there had been an increase in conference attendance and more enthusiasm according to the staff and administration. The administration at OCS was considering the possibility of implementing student-led conferences school wide. Prior to making any decisions, the principal wanted to receive additional data on: Parents' perceptions regarding the influence student-led conferencing had on parental awareness of student academic performance; parental expectations; parenting

style; communication between parents and students in regards to school; the influence student-led conferencing had on student motivation and student accountability; as well as any additional perceived benefits of student-led conferences.

Statement of the Problem

The administration and staff at OCS recognized student-led conferences as having a direct influence on the communication between parents and students regarding school, parental expectations, and parenting style, in addition to promoting parent awareness of student academic performance as well as student motivation and accountability. However, research to validate this belief had yet to be done. More specifically, the school administration had stated that it would be beneficial to have an outside source study the experiences of OCS parents with regards to student-led conferences and determine how, if at all, student-led conferences have influenced parent awareness of student academic performance in content areas, communication between parents and students in regards to academics, parental expectations, and parenting style, as well as the influence student-led conferencing has had on student motivation and accountability (K. Lucas, personal communication, September 2, 2010).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this concurrent multiple methods study was to inform the work at OCS related to elementary student-led conferences in grades kindergarten through third grade during the 2009-2010 school year, by exploring OCS elementary parent perceptions regarding the benefits, if any, of student-led

conferences. In addition, the purpose of the study was to explore parent perceptions about how, if at all, student-led conferences have influenced parent awareness of K-3 student academic performance in content areas, communication between parents and students in regards to school, parental expectations and parenting style, as well as the influence student-led conferencing has had on student motivation and accountability. All parents of previous Kindergarten-third grade students who were currently first through fourth grade students and had participated in student-led conferences prior to the 2010-2011 academic years were invited to participate in the study. Parents of current kindergarten students only were excluded from the research since these parents had not yet had the opportunity to participate in student-led conferences and parents of fifth and sixth grade students were also excluded because the sampling would be small.

Parent perceptions regarding the benefits of student-led conferences were collected using a quantitative structured survey with pre-determined variables culled from the research literature. Parent awareness regarding student academic performance in content areas, communication between parents and students in regards to school; as well as the influence student-led conferences have had on parental expectations, parenting style, student motivation, and student accountability; were explored using a qualitative written questionnaire with semi-structured questions. The questionnaire also requested parent permission to be contacted for a follow-up interview in the event that the researcher deemed a need to clarify any parent responses to the questionnaire.

Follow-up interviews were to be conducted with a selected sample of questionnaire respondents. Interview questions were open-ended in nature and invited parents to further explain and clarify questionnaire responses.

Research Questions

The following questions guided this study:

1. What do parents of current first -fourth grade elementary students at Ontario Christian School who have participated in student-led conferences prior to the current academic year 2010-11 school year, perceive to be the benefits, if any, of student-led conferences?
2. What are the perceptions of current Ontario Christian School first -fourth grade parents, who have participated in student-led conferences prior to the current 2010-2011 academic year, as to how, if at all, student-led conferences have influenced communication between parents and students regarding school, parental expectations, and parenting style?
3. What are the perceptions of current Ontario Christian School first -fourth grade parents, who have participated in student-led conferences prior to the current 2010-2011 academic year, as to how, if at all, student-led conferences have influenced student academic performance in content areas, student motivation, and student accountability?

Importance of the Study

The administration and faculty at OCS were committed to high standards for student academic achievement and classroom behavior. They believed that parents were important partners in helping students to achieve in school and that student-led conferences provided a greater means of promoting parent awareness and support for student learning than had been possible heretofore via traditional parent-teacher conferences. OCS had implemented student-led conferences school wide in the seventh and eighth grades and piloted student-led conferences at the elementary level. All kindergarten through third grade classes implemented student-led conferences during the 2009-2010 academic years.

OCS administration and faculty perceived that the piloting of student-led conferences at the elementary level had been beneficial and that student-led conferences had promoted greater parent awareness of student academic performance, communication between parents and students, parental expectations, parenting style, as well as student motivation and accountability. They now wanted like to formally collect data detailing parent perceptions about benefits, if any, associated with student-led conferences and how, if at all, student-led conferences have influenced parent awareness of student academic performance in content areas, communication between parents and students in regards to academics, parental expectations, and parenting style, as well as parent awareness of student motivation and accountability. It was anticipated that the outcomes of this study would provide OCS with information that would help

them to evaluate their student-led conference pilot program at the elementary level and inform their decision whether or not to expand student-led conferences to all elementary classrooms.

This research study may be of value to other schools and districts that are currently implementing student-led conferences at the elementary level and who desire to assess parent-perceived benefits of student-led conferences and explore how student-led conferences promote parent awareness of student academic performance and classroom behavior. The instruments utilized in this study might serve as a model for other schools and the study procedures might be replicated.

This research might also be of interest to schools and districts that are considering implementing student-led conferences at the elementary level. This study's outcomes may provide such schools and districts with information that would be useful in designing and implementing student-led conferences. OCS might further serve as a resource for schools and districts that are interested in a transition model from traditional to student-led conferences.

Existing research provides evidence that student-led conferences are a means for teachers to scaffold students in setting their own learning goals, which may also be a key to increasing achievement, accountability, and other skills necessary for lifelong learners (Fuchs et al., 2003; McDonald & Boud, 2003; Palmer & Wehmeyer, 2003). This study will contribute to existing research because there has yet to be any research done on student-led conferences at

Christian schools that include elementary students beginning at a kindergarten level.

Limitations

1. The researcher limited this study to a single private Christian school in Ontario, California.
2. This study was limited to parent perceptions obtained via parent self-reported data.
3. This study was limited to describing parent awareness as self-reported, not measuring parent involvement.
4. This study was limited to the perceptions of parents of current first through fourth grade students who participated in student-led conferences at OCS prior to the current 2010-2011 academic year. New parents of current kindergarten students were excluded from this study, as they had not had the opportunity to participate in student-led conferences.
5. Parents of current fifth and sixth grade students were excluded due to a small sampling size.
6. Subjects were limited to those parents of first through fourth grade parents who were willing to participate in the study and respond to the quantitative survey and qualitative questionnaire.
7. Follow-up interviews for further clarification of parent questionnaire responses were limited to those parents who participated in the study and were willing to be contacted for an interview with the researcher.

8. Findings were limited to parents' abilities to recall, describe, and evaluate their student-led conferences experiences.

Assumptions

1. It was assumed that all parent respondents would answer the survey, questionnaire, and follow-up interview questions candidly, honestly, and to the best of their recollection.
2. It was assumed that parent responses would accurately reflect and represent their prior experiences with student-led conferences.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions are given to provide an understanding of the key terms and variables used throughout the study.

- *Academic Performance* – How well a student meets standards set out by the local government and educational institution itself (Bell, 2008).
- *Accountability* – For the purposes of this study accountability means student's self-assessing their past and present work and realizing what they do and do not understand (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005).
- *Achievement* – Student success on standardized tests, grades, and teacher ratings (Jeynes, 2005).
- *Communication about school* – Parents' interest in and communication about their children's schoolwork (Marzano, 2003).
- *Content areas* – The four principal academic subject areas that constitute a student's fundamental education: language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. The term "social studies"

can be applied to history and/or geography classes. Students may have varying interest and talents across the core content areas, but they can expect to study all four disciplines at least through high school (“Core content areas,” n.d.).

- *Effectiveness of student-led conferences* – Determined by the parent’s perceptions of what they learned about their child and their child’s learning process. Student-led conferences promote parent participation in the learning process (Bailey & Guskey, 2001).
- *Institutional Review Board (IRB)* - “In the United States, any college, university, or research institution will have an internal review board (IRB) that scrutinizes all proposals for conducting human research under the auspices of the institution” (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005, p. 102). The IRB is made up of scholars and researchers from a broad range of disciplines whose role is check proposed research studies to ensure that the procedures are not harmful to the participants (Leedy & Ormrod).
- *Likert Scale* – A rating scale developed by Rensis Likert in the 1930s to assess people’s attitudes (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005).
- *Parent* – Any of the adults who carry responsibility for the care of a child, including, but not limited to father, mother, grandparent, uncle, or aunt (Brumlow, 2009).

- *Parent awareness* – Monitoring and having knowledge of one's child's activities, and communication in a given setting (Hayes, Hudson, & Matthews, 2007).
- *Parental expectations* – The extent to which parents communicate their own academic aspirations for their children (Fan & Chen, 2001).
- *Parenting style* – The manner in which parents relay their academic expectations to their children (Marzano, 2003).
- *Perceptions* – How a person uniquely views or observes an event or performance (Syverson, 2005).
- *Portfolio* – An organized collection of evidence that shows a student's academic progress, special achievements, skills, and attitudes over time (Bailey & Guskey, 2001).
- *Student-led conference* – A conference with parents led by students during which the students lead parents through a discussion of their work, which is usually organized in a portfolio collection (Bailey & Guskey, 2001).
- *Student Motivation* – Student's desire for success and avoidance of failure (Marzano, 2003).

Organization of the Study

This study is organized in 5 chapters. The first chapter provides an introduction and background information on student-led conferences, the problem statement, the overall purpose of the study, research questions used to guide this study, the importance of the study, limitations and assumptions

associated with the study, and definitions of terms. Chapter 2 is a comprehensive literature review containing seminal as well as contemporary literature. This chapter will explore: Factors that influence student achievement that can be addressed by schools and school leaders, student factors that influence student achievement, strategies for positively addressing student factors, NCLB and its purpose, types of assessments, the history of conferences including a description of student-led conferences, parent Involvement and awareness, student accountability, prior research that has been done on the topic, and benefits as well as challenges associated with student-led conferences. Chapter 3 is an outline of the methods and data collection procedures that the researcher intends to use in conducting this study, the instruments that will be used, a restatement of the research questions, the research design chosen, and a discussion of the human subjects chosen to participate in the study. Chapter 4 consists of a comprehensive report of findings of the data collected from the study survey, the study questionnaire, and selected follow-up interviews with questionnaire respondents for clarification purposes. A descriptive analysis of the survey data has been reported in relation to the first research question about parent-perceived benefits, if any, associated with student-led conferences. A qualitative analysis of the questionnaire and selected questionnaire follow-up interview findings will be reported in response to the second and third research questions related to the influence that student-led conferences have had on communication between parents and students regarding school, parent expectations, parenting style, and academic performance as well as student motivation and

accountability. Finally, Chapter 5 presents a discussion and interpretation of the findings and conclusions and proposes recommendations for policy, practice, and further study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter provides a comprehensive literature review related to the variables within this study, as well as a review of seminal and contemporary literature and research related to: (a) participation in student-led conferences, (b) influences of student-led conferences, (c) parental involvement and awareness, and (d) student motivation and accountability. This literature review will include: Marzano factors that influence student performance/achievement, Marzano student factors that influence student achievement, strategies for positively addressing student factors, parent-teacher school conferences, student-led conferences as a strategy for addressing home environment, intelligence/background and motivation factors, what is a student-led conference? parent involvement/awareness, student accountability, empirical research in support of student-led conferences, benefits provided by student-led conferences as well as the challenges brought about by student-led conferences. Each of these topics will be explored using relevant literature, and the focus will be to provide information supporting the exploration of how student-led conferences influence communication between parents and students regarding school, parental expectations, parenting style, academic performance, student motivation as well as student accountability.

Traditional parent-teacher conferences have been conducted for many decades; the main purpose of these conferences has been to provide parents with information regarding their child's academic progress, how much the child

has completed, and not necessarily their academic performance, how well the child completed the assignments. Information was disseminated with the overall intention of helping the student. Unfortunately, through the years, traditional parent-teacher conferencing has done little to guide parents and students in working together or help students become accountable for their academic progress. In traditional parent-teacher conferences, the child is peripheral to the discussion and the teacher holds the position of power (Woodard, 1993). In recent years many educators have begun to question the effectiveness of traditional parent–teacher conferences.

Considering that the main purpose of parent conferencing involves discussing the student's abilities and progress, why are the students left out of the equation? By excluding the student, the traditional parent-teacher conference leaves a gap between school and home (Hackmann, Kenworthy, & Nibbelink, 1995). The responsibility for academic success is taken out of the child's hands, hindering his/her accountability.

A different approach to a traditional conference is a student-led conference. Through the process of student-led conferencing students take charge by conducting organized conferences with their parents or guests, review the work they completed at school, and discuss their learning, educational goals, and the strategies they intend to use in order to meet those goals (Benson & Barnett, 2005). Implementing student-led conferences is intended to provide parents and students with a process to help increase student accountability and

parental awareness about how well their child is accomplishing academic tasks at school, as well as areas in which help might be needed.

Marzano Factors that Influence Student Performance/Achievement That Can Be Addressed by Schools and School Leaders

There are numerous factors influencing student performance/achievement that can be addressed by schools and school leaders. Martin, Mullis, and Chrostowski (2003) reveal that student achievement is directly influenced by a student's energy and drive to learn and work. The results of Niebuhr and Niebuhr's (1999) longitudinal study determine a possible cause and effect between motivation and academic achievement. If students are motivated they will achieve. If organized lessons are prepared and taught students will learn, perform, and therefore achieve. If teachers are providing effective lessons that keep students engaged, students will pay attention and work to their potential in order to achieve.

Marzano (2003) addresses many factors that influence student achievement and has categorized these factors into three general categories: school, teacher, and student. The order in which these factors are listed below reflects their degree of impact on student achievement from the main factor to the sub sequential factors that are affected.

- School
 - A Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum
 - Challenging Goals and Effective Feedback
 - Parent and Community Involvement

- Safe and Orderly Environment
- Collegiality and Professionalism
- Teacher
 - Instructional strategies
 - Classroom management
 - Classroom curriculum design
- Student
 - Home Atmosphere
 - Learned Intelligence and background knowledge
 - Motivation

Marzano (2003) compiled his data through a reanalysis and updating of a review student achievement conducted by Scheerens and Bosker in 1997. Listed as first in order of importance under the school category is “guaranteed and viable curriculum” (p. 22), which is primarily a combination of Marzano’s factors “opportunity to learn” and “time” (p. 22), this means that every student should have an equal opportunity to learn. Factors that influence achievement on standardized tests can include whether or not students have had an opportunity to study a particular topic or learn how to solve a particular type of problem on a test. Next listed are challenging goals and effective feedback, which are a combination of what other researchers refer to as “high expectations” (p. 35). Students must be provided with challenging goals and receive constant feedback in reference to their progress. Parent and community involvement reflects the extent to which parents as well as the community are involved in and supportive

of a school. The fourth school factor listed is a safe and orderly environment. The essence of this factor is that teachers and students need to feel safe or they will not have the necessary psychological energy for teaching and learning. Without a minimal level of safety and order, a school has little chance of positively affecting student achievement. The final level in the school factor is collegiality and professionalism, which speaks to how the staff members in the school interact with each other. Teachers should be supportive of one another and always interact in a professional manner.

Teacher factors comprise the next factor category. Within the teacher level factors the category of greatest importance is instructional strategies. Marzano (2003) states that in order for teachers to implement research-based instructional strategies they must be provided with an instructional framework for educational units that employ research-based strategies. Another teacher-level factor is classroom management. Marzano describes classroom management as “the confluence of teacher actions in four distinct areas: (a) establishing and enforcing rules and procedures, (b) carrying out disciplinary actions, (c) maintaining effective teacher and student relationships, and (d) maintaining an appropriate mental set for management” (p. 88). The third teacher-level factor is “classroom curriculum design” (p.106). Marzano recommends five action steps related to this final level: (a) have teachers provide clear expectations and explanations; (b) provide opportunities for students to have multiple exposure to the content; (c) clearly identify skills that are to be mastered; (d) have teachers present the content of the lessons in groups or categories; and (e) engage students in

complex tasks that provide opportunities for critical thinking. Within the final factory category Marzano has identified three factors that influence student learning: home atmosphere, learned intelligence/ background knowledge as well as student motivation.

Although Marzano (2003) offers information about various factors that can affect student performance/ achievement, this study will exclusively focus on the student factor level since student-led conferences directly address the student factors.

Marzano Student Factors that Influence Student Achievement

Home atmosphere. Home atmosphere is composed of three basic elements: (a) communication about school, which refers to parents' interest and communication about their children's schoolwork; (b) supervision, which generally refers to the extent to which the parents monitor their children's behavior in order to optimize their academic achievement; and (c) parental expectations along with parenting style, which Marzano (2003) views as the most important element of home environment. High parental expectations their children transfers into high achievement, and parents typically display their expectations using one of three parenting styles. An authoritarian style is the one most parents establish at home and takes place with little or no discussion. Rules are set and when they are not followed there is quick punishment usually accompanied with negative emotions from the parents (Marzano, 2003). Using the permissive style parents establish few if any rules and children are rarely punished for inappropriate behavior. The preferred style according to research,

when aiming for student academic achievement is authoritative. The authoritative style is characterized by parental warmth, fair discipline and punishment, and consistency in child rearing. Parents with an authoritative style communicate daily interest in their children's lives.

Learned intelligence and background knowledge. According to Marzano (2003), learned intelligence and background knowledge are practically synonymous and learned intelligence is comprised of fluid Intelligence and crystallized intelligence. Fluid intelligence is said to be innate and not altered by environmental factors and encompasses areas such as memory capacity, working memory efficiency, and abstract reasoning. Crystallized intelligence is the only type of intelligence that is learned and for all practical purposes the same as background knowledge. It is believed that Fluid intelligence is instrumental in developing Crystallized Intelligence, The more Fluid Intelligence that a person has the more easily Crystallized Intelligence is formed. Crystallized Intelligence has been more closely identified with academic knowledge and achievement and therefore explains the strong relationship between background knowledge and achievement. Crystallized intelligence is learned knowledge about the world; background knowledge is that learned knowledge about a specific domain.

Motivation. The next student factor is motivation, which is characterized as a student's desire for success and avoidance of failure. Students' emotional dynamics, need to internalize self-worth, and self-esteem are all related to

motivation. Through extensive research Marzano (2003) has identified five theories that provide a consistent definition of the nature of motivation.

1. John Atkinson believed that motivation can be described in terms of two competing forces or drives. One is the desire to reach for success and the other is the fear of failure (Atkinson, 1957, 1964, 1987; Atkinson & Raynor, 1974). This makes motivation within a classroom very difficult especially when a teacher is working toward setting high standards. Students who are usually success oriented thrive when given an opportunity to be challenged; however students that are anxiously trying to avoid failure might end up self-handicapping to make sure they fail for reasons other than lack of ability, such as procrastination.
2. Attribution Theory is the belief that how students perceive the cause of their success or failure is a better example of motivation than the actual success or failure itself (Marzano, 2003).
3. Self-Worth Theory is built upon individuals' search for self-acceptance. Self-acceptance usually stems from status acceptance received from one's peers. As a result this makes the classroom a very threatening place for some students because acceptance is many times related to academic achievement (Marzano, 2003).
4. Emotions are also a contributing factor to motivation. People are motivated by either success or driven by failure. When people don't

have a justified reason to show emotion they make one up, usually in the form of failure (Marzano, 2003).

5. Self-System encompasses many of the dynamics described in previous theories and contains a network that causes individuals to make the decision to engage in a new task or not. Action steps addressed by Marzano (2003) include: altering the competitive nature of classroom success, engaging students in long term projects that tap into their passions, and providing students with information about motivation and training techniques to control their negative motivation.

Strategies for Positively Addressing Student Factors

The No Child Left Behind act, also referred to as NCLB, is a much discussed and researched federal policy which was brought into existence within the educational system under the Bush administration in 2002 (Peterson, 2005). Nine years later, NCLB is a topic that still warrants discussion. NCLB reauthorized a number of academic federal programs with the goal of improving the performance of United States elementary and secondary schools by increasing the standards of accountability for states, school districts, and schools (Peterson, 2005). Additionally, it promoted an increased focus on reading and reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA). Its intent was to help improve student achievement.

NCLB was viewed by society as an educational breakthrough, especially for students that attended underserved schools. Civil rights advocates praised NCLB for its emphasis on improving education for students of color, those living

in poverty, new English learners, and students with disabilities. NCLB aimed to raise achievement and close the achievement gap, which is the observed disparity calculated by a number of educational measures between the performance of groups of students. This was proposed to be done by setting annual test-score targets for students, based on a goal of 100 percent proficiency by 2014. In addition, NCLB required schools to hire highly qualified teachers and intended to develop plans to provide such teachers by enforcing more stringent requirements for those wanting to enter the field of education. (Hess & Finn, 2007).

The educational blueprint sent to congress by President Obama keeps the same basic structure and intent of the Bush Era NCLB, maintaining annual testing and data-driven accountability, however now instead of all students being proficient by 2014, the Obama Administration states that the goal is for all students to graduate from high school and be ready for college by 2014. In addition the Obama blueprint is requiring states to identify their lowest-performing 5% of schools and take strong measures to upgrade those schools, including firing the principal and teachers (Chaddock, 2010). "This blueprint lays the right markers to help us reset the bar for our students and the nation, (Chaddock, 2010, para. 2)" said Rep. George Miller of California, who chairs the Education and Labor Committee. The overall plan is to identify these low-performing schools through testing/assessments. Assessment is imperative, however firing principals and teachers might not place accountability and awareness where it is needed to ensure that all students achieve academic success.

Types of assessments. There are various types of assessments in the world of academics and they are used to evaluate students and determine the direction an educator should take in order to provide students with the best possible academic program. Tom Angelo (1995), an internationally renowned expert on assessment, once summarized the assessment process this way:

Assessment is an ongoing process aimed at understanding and improving student learning. It involves making our expectations explicit and public; setting appropriate criteria and high standards for learning quality; systematically gathering, analyzing, and interpreting evidence to determine how well performance, matches those expectations and standards; and using the resulting information to document, explain, and improve performance. (pp. 7-9)

In the field of education, Wormeli (2006) describes three types of assessments often used in the field of education; diagnostic, formative and summative, and identifies the roles they play in academic instruction. Diagnostic assessments are also known as pre-assessments because they are given before instruction starts; their purpose is to determine students' readiness to receive the knowledge and skills that are going to be taught. Formative assessments take place at various times throughout an instructional unit in order to provide the teacher with insight as to the direction instruction should take, and summative assessments are administered at the end of the instruction period. All three assessments have an intricate role in the student learning process, as described below.

Diagnostic assessments. Diagnostic assessments are a type of formative assessment because they give teachers a guideline of what the students know and how they are performing initially. Diagnostic assessments are usually administered at the beginning of the year or when a student first enters a class—before instruction begins—to determine present knowledge, skill, and interest. They are not used to assign grades (Johnson & Johnson, 2002; McTighe & O'Connor, 2005). An accurate and detailed analysis of areas in which a student might need additional review and assistance as well as identifying special needs, can take place in a diagnostic assessment (Black, 1998).

The frequency of assessment varies, and is generally determined by the purpose of the assessment. Most schools use a published assessment program at the beginning of the school year in order to give teachers an opportunity to gain current and accurate information about their new group of students. The information they obtain can be used to foster the development, in addition to delivering the curriculum, in an effort to link the teaching and learning needs of the current grade. Forster (2001) notes, "If test results are to be used to inform teaching, then they need to be administered early in the year" (p. 43). However, assessing students frequently does guarantee academic growth; if problem areas are not addressed then assessment repetition will merely confirm that learning or growth has not occurred.

Summative assessments. Summative assessments are administered at the end of a unit or marking period in order to determine a final grade; these kinds of assessments usually do not help the teachers inform the students as to

why they received the score they did, why their responses were wrong, or how they might improve their score. The goal of summative assessments is for reporting purposes or certification (Johnson & Johnson, 2002; McTighe & O'Connor, 2005). In other words, it is used to communicate how a student performed at a certain level and whether the student should advance or review the work that was given. The earliest form of summative assessment took place in China over 2000 years ago to select workers for esteemed civil service jobs (Black, 1998). Summative assessments are one of most frequently used type of assessments within the educational system, and the most common form has been formal testing (STEM, 2010). With their heavy reliance on multiple-choice items, summative assessment tests target the acquisition of factual knowledge.

In the mid-1980s, curriculum standards were introduced in the United States and generated a need for classroom assessments that would be able to accurately measure what students knew and were able to do (Johnson & Johnson, 2002). This led the United States educational system to begin using performance assessments, administered at the end of each year, which require students to demonstrate what specific skills and concepts they know in relation to the standards that they should have mastered (Forster, 2001). Performance assessments require students to complete tasks and apply what they know as opposed to just regurgitating facts. Making the task both challenging and engaging can lend a measure of authenticity to a performance assessment and having students complete an authentic task that requires them to apply what they know can be more a more accurate measure of mastery, as opposed to relying

on short term memory to recognize correct answers. When this happens, and students are able to apply what they have learned, assessment becomes an integral part of the learning process.

Although educators use various types of assessments, summative assessments are most frequently used in schools all over the world. Black (1986) reported that in Scottish secondary schools, 87% of the assessments used were summative as opposed to formative. These assessments were used to indicate a school's level of accountability (Johnson & Johnson, 2002). The standardized tests that are so commonly used within the U.S. educational system are an example of summative assessments. In addition, the accountability measure of public K-12 education under the No Child Left Behind Legislation is also primarily measured by summative assessments.

Formative assessments. Formative assessments gather information at the same time the students are learning. They may be given during a learning activity in order to provide the teacher with insight as to how well the students are grasping the concepts being taught. The importance of formative assessment is addressed by Black and Wiliam's (1998b) paper *Inside the Black Box: Raising Standards through Classroom Assessment*. They provide evidence that high-quality formative assessment has a positive effect on student learning because it can help teachers gage their lessons. In addition, it appears as though formative assessments are especially beneficial for students who have historically not done well academically, in turn narrowing the gap between low and high achievers while increasing overall achievement. Most teachers from kindergarten to college

professors tend to use oral questioning as a method of formative assessment, however, when a large number of students are involved teachers usually do not have enough time to question every student individually. Formative assessment is also useful in virtually all learning activities such as preparing oral and written reports, fieldwork, projects, and case studies. Teachers can use this information to guide their instruction by having concrete assessments to refer to and not leave a child's academic success or need to review, to memory. Teaching is an intricate process and most class sizes range from 15 to 35 students depending on the grade level. Black and Wiliam (1998b) conclude that it is extremely difficult for an educator to remember every student's academic need without having accurate records which they can refer to in place.

Formative assessments take place when teachers relay information back to the students in a way that helps them become better learners. Formative assessments also involve students being put in situations in which they are able to reflect on their own learning process. If the purpose of assessment is to support high quality learning, then formative assessments should be viewed as the overall most important type of assessment. Black and Wiliam (1998a) support this theory and through their extensive literature review they show that formative assessment, when implemented properly, has powerful results and should be used to improve student learning.

Gallagher and Worth (2008) state that formative assessments provide descriptive data rather than judgments. Black and Wiliam (1998a) reviewed at least 20 studies and found that the formative assessment results in noteworthy

gains in student learning and increased achievement on summative measures from kindergarten to college-level students. However, teachers still face problems using formative assessment models in school. Black and Wiliam's review of current literature regarding teachers and assessment identifies three key problems relating to teachers using formative assessment:

- Formative assessment is not clearly understood by teachers and in addition it does not indicate strong practice;
- The certification and accountability in regards to national and local requirements exert a powerful influence on formative assessment practice; and
- Formative assessment implementation calls for rather deep changes in teachers' perceptions in relation to their students, their own role and in their classroom practice. (p. 47)

Although most students tend to benefit from formative assessments, according to Black and Wiliam (1998a), as previously mentioned, low performing students benefit the most. Pupils quickly learn to label themselves as good learners or helpless; the latter label can lead pupils to be unmotivated and believe that there is no point in making efforts to learn. Good formative assessments therefore must not be compared to other students and should be devoted to building self-esteem and self-confidence in every pupil. Formative self-assessment, which is the student's ability to assess their academic performance, can be developed to improve pupils' capacity and desire to learn,

but according to Black and Wiliam pupils' experience of traditional summative practices, receiving report cards/grades, is an obstacle to such development.

Parent-Teacher School Conferences

Assessments are a tool to measure student progress and identify areas of growth as well as areas where improvement might be needed. If parents are going to be instrumental in supporting student achievement it is necessary to have a means in which educators can relay the information which is needed to parents. School conferences are not something new within the school community. School-wide parent-teacher conferences have been used for many years as a way to open the lines of communication between home and school and relay information about grades, behavior etc. The earliest reported use of parent-teacher conferences for the purpose of reporting students' progress to the parents occurred in the Liberty School in Highland Park, Michigan during the 1932-1933 school years. The parent-teacher conference plan was developed to provide a more flexible means for reporting student progress. Teachers and parents of first grade students participated in the conferences for the first year. The parent-teacher conference plan continued and during the second year, parents of second grade students were included, and by the third year the parent-teacher conference plan included all of the primary school students, grades 1-3. There was a minimum of one conference held per year and the teachers agreed to visit the student's home if the parents were not able to come to the school (Coulter, 1937).

In the early 1940s administrators in the Minneapolis, Minnesota school system decided to experiment with the process of parent-teacher conferences. According to Cutright (1947), who was assistant superintendent at the time, the conference process grew from the teachers' writing informal notes to the parents in an effort to inform parents of their children's academic progress. By 1946 the district had officially implemented a formal conference process that replaced end-of-year report cards for elementary students. The district was pleased with the communication between parents and teachers and recognized that conferences gave parents a better understanding of their children's progress while giving them an opportunity to directly interact with the school.

By the 1950s parent-teacher conferencing was becoming more recognized and prevalent in almost all quality elementary schools (D'Evelyn, 1963). Parent-teacher conferences have continued to be a common method for relaying student progress and have evolved over the years. Currently, they serve the main purpose of elucidating the academic plan and illustrating the behavior expectations for the given term. The conferences are usually held once a term and vary in time length. According to Simon (2001), "The conference process has come to represent a sharing of information and a display of a child's growth" (p. 8).

The parent-teacher conference has typically only involved the parent and the teacher: The student did not participate. When using this traditional parent-teacher conference style the student usually does not have the opportunity to offer any input. In addition, traditional parent-teacher conferences do not

encourage parents and students to work together or encourage students to be accountable for their academic progress. Traditional conferences have been used primarily as a tool for delivering results to parents in order for them to gain an understanding of their child's overall progress. But, as previously mentioned, parent-teacher conferences are constantly evolving (Simon, 2001).

Brandt (as cited in Gismondi, 2009), an elementary school teacher, states that by following the traditional parent-teacher conference format she was not providing the parents with all of the information they needed. She asserts that over time this traditional model, which had connected the home and school for years, has become a process of the past while time constraints along with guidelines have made the process repetitive and stressful. According to Little and Allan (1989) one of the greatest benefits of student-led conferences is that they do increase student accountability—something that traditional parent-teacher conferences do not do—and move the student from a passive participant to an active one, “students assume equal status in discussions concerning their academic progress” (p. 218). When students are allowed to be active participants in conferences, they are also given the opportunity to critically review their academic progress.

Unlike traditional parent-teacher conferences, each step of a student-led conference involves activities for the teacher, parents, and students. The teacher's responsibility in this process is primarily to organize the conference environment. This includes scheduling, guiding portfolio collection, rehearsing with students, and arranging classroom space to accommodate families. The

parent's role is to provide reinforcement, encouragement, and praise. Parents also ask probing questions, help students look realistically at the quality of their work, and facilitate deeper student reflection. The student takes a leadership role in student-led conferences; he or she is responsible for working with teachers to identify strengths and learning needs and then for collecting evidence over time to illustrate progress. In addition, the student takes an active role in helping with many of the details of the actual conference, such as: inviting parents and scheduling, role-playing and rehearsing, preparing the physical space, and taking home pertinent information for parents both before and after the conference (Bailey & Guskey, 2001). By allowing students to act as leaders, student-led conferences can in turn create a nurturing atmosphere in which students can become excited about sharing their academic growth and goals with their parents (Lewis, 2006).

Student-led Conferences as a Strategy for Addressing Home Atmosphere, Intelligence, Background, and Motivation Factors

Student-led conferences prove to offer many advantages for students in the area of student achievement. Home atmosphere, intelligence and background/motivation are all stated by Marzano (2003) as areas that directly influences student achievement. Within the realm of home atmosphere is communication about school; supervision which is the parents ability to monitor behavior in order for the child to achieve to their maximum potential and parental expectations. Through the process of student-led conferences the area of home atmosphere can be improved for the student. Student-led conferences open the

barrier of communication about school between students and their parents.

Austin (1994), Bailey and Guskey (2001), Benson and Barnett (2005), and Little and Allan (1989) all concur that student-led conferences are an excellent way for students to effectively relay their learning to their parents. When students communicate with the parents, information is transferred in a way that everyone can understand. By having students facilitate the conference they procure their parents attention because parents enjoy seeing their child elucidate their learning. Since student-led conferences require students to focus on assignments and complete academic tasks as they would in class parents are able to witness behavior concerns which might hinder a student academically, such as diverting their attention to other students completing assignments, spending excessive time erasing, not completely reading the directions causing them to complete the assignment incorrectly. These are all problems that parents can easily identify through the process of student-led conferences. As parents participate in the student-led conference they are able to see how their child completes assignments and the time required for them to complete assignments compared to other students that might be participating in conferences with their parents at the same time. Inadvertently this can increase parent expectations. In addition parents can identify areas where their child excels and increase their expectations.

When students have to report to their parents during the conference the relationship between their vocabulary development and access to wide variety of experiences is increased. Through the use of portfolios which are a compilation

of work completed, Little and Allan (1989), as well as activity participation, which the student would like to share with their parent, makes student-led conferences an excellent tool for students to tap into their background knowledge and intelligence. Theory base implies that learned intelligence can be directly enhanced by a combined program of wide reading and vocabulary instruction (Marzano, 2003). The student-led conference format is designed to increase vocabulary instruction by requiring the student to initiate, lead and explain (Stiggins, 2005).

Student-led conferences are also a means for increasing student motivation. Ausitn (1994), states that her students showed more motivation for learning through the use of student-led conferences than any other motivation techniques previously used. Student-led conferences also require teachers to relay clear expectations to students since they are responsible for interpreting and reporting the information about their learning and assignments and according to Stiggins (2005), when clear expectations are relayed about learning goals motivation significantly increases.

What is a Student-Led Conference?

The model of student-led conferences pioneered by Little and Allan (1989) consists of three steps: *preparation, implementation, and evaluation*.

Preparation. During the preparation stage the parents need to be informed about the type of conference they will experience. For many parents, student-led conferencing will be a new experience. In addition, the teacher needs to explain the overall objectives for the conference to the parents and prepare the

students to be facilitators. According to Austin (1994), the preparation process involves four steps, each of which builds upon each other. Students, along with the teacher, will:

1. Together, identify common values, particularly concrete characteristics of a “good student,”
2. Assemble the components of the conference portfolio by gathering information about themselves as learners,
3. Participate in a teacher-student conference discussing the results of the gathered data and completing the report card, and
4. Participate in a student practice conference verbally rehearsing the conference. (p. 29)

Benson and Barnett (2005) further note, “Preparing the classroom is an important aspect of the conference in the elementary school and should begin on the first day of school” (p. 53). Preparation is a process and successful conference implementation depends upon it. Prior to conference day the student, with the teacher’s assistance, is responsible for organizing a conference portfolio. The portfolio, which is used as an evaluation tool, consists of a collection of student work samples that are collected over a given period of time. Portfolios are an intricate part of the preparation leading up to the conference. The teacher and the student evaluate work samples together and choose work to include in the portfolio. The purpose of the portfolio is to collect samples that can be used to celebrate students as learners (Austin, 1994). The students are responsible for

choosing samples that show progress, although the teacher may add to the collection as necessary.

According to Jackson and Davis (2000), the portfolio should include pieces that represent the student's skills, efforts, and understanding. It is essential to remember that the portfolio is not to be used as a means to highlight the student's best work, but rather an opportunity to display the student's growth (Camic & Cafasso, 2003). This type of portfolio is referred to as a "working portfolio" because it shows a progression of work throughout the given period of time and, according to Little and Allan (1989) is the best type of portfolio to use in conferences. By using a working portfolio parents are able to clearly see the progress their child has made over time. In addition, parents are able to analyze whether the student is making progress at a greater rate than the last grading period, whether his/her progress has slowed down, or whether his/her progress has come to a halt, which could be the result of other issues that might need to be addressed. When viewing the portfolio the parent should get an idea of the learning that has taken place and how his/her child has handled the academic challenges. Work that is too large to fit in the portfolio can be displayed around the room on bookshelves or walls (Benson & Barnett, 1999).

Many adults are already familiar with portfolios and often use them to organize job related paperwork and assignments when working towards professional goals. In addition, important papers are often stored in the portfolios for careful review at a later date. However, portfolios are quite new to many students especially in the younger grades, and when used for student-led

conferences portfolios bring on a whole new meaning as a classroom tool. When it comes to students, Benson and Barnett (2005), note that portfolios only become an authentic tool when students use them as more than just a folder for collecting class work: for example, when students share portfolio work with parents at a student-led conference. Giving students a task, such as evaluating their work and organizing it for placement in their working portfolios, can increase a students' motivation for class work as well enhance their overall work quality.

Student reflection is also an intricate component in the preparation of student-led conferences. Reflection provides an opportunity for students to thoroughly examine themselves as learners; this usually occurs when students are organizing their portfolios to be used during the conference (Austin, 1994). Encouraging academic self-reflection in students helps them to analyze the lessons they have been taught so they are able to explain what they learned as well as their academic outcome to their parents (Benson & Barnett, 2005). The art of reflection begins at the beginning of the school year and through the reflection process the students learn how to differentiate between the areas they thoroughly understand and those in which they may need additional help (Bailey & Guskey, 2001).

The process of student-led conferences combined with the use of portfolios gives validity to the five standards of authentic instruction suggested by Benson and Barnett (2005) because the portfolio process requires:

1. Higher order thinking,
2. Depth of knowledge,

3. Connectedness to the world beyond the classroom,
4. Substantive conversation – student and teacher talking within the classroom to learn and understand the substance of a subject, and
5. Social support for student achievement. (p. 9)

According to Benson and Barnett, “Portfolios and student led conferences are so powerful in the classroom because they are applications of the theories on the use of authentic tasks and assessments as tools to enhance student motivation” (p. 5).

Implementation. The implementation step of the conference takes place the night of the conference. According to Benson and Barnett (2005) the most logical place to hold the conference at the elementary level is in the student’s classroom or homeroom; this venue provides a perfect backdrop for student-led conferences because elementary school classrooms are already child centered. Student-led conferences also offer the opportunity for teachers to conduct more than one conference at a time, since the teacher is not the main facilitator or participant discussing the child’s progress with the parent. As parents enter the room they need to be reminded that they are entering the child’s world and view the classroom as an inviting atmosphere conducive for a student’s academic success. The conference takes place with the student acting as facilitator and the teacher as an observer. Some teachers may decide to have a video running which shows the students at work as the conferences take place.

The overall attitude of the participants during the implementation of student-led conferences is found to be parallel to traditional conferences. Several

articles have been published offering suggestions about how to successfully implement a student-led conference. Moore (2003) and Stevens and Tollafield (2003) offer the following tips:

- Parents need to be greeted in an inviting manner,
- Good communication must take place,
- Pertinent information must be delivered,
- Parents must be included in the discussion,
- Parents must arrive with a positive attitude and assume that the teacher has the child's best interest in mind,
- Don't go in to the conference with any pre-conceived notions about the process,
- Don't let previous negative experiences hinder the conference,
- Teacher must have suggestions for what parents can do at home to help their child, and
- Be sure to create a conference record.

Benson and Barnett (2005) highlight what takes place on the actual conference day. Many teachers chose to give a brief overview to the parents and students as to what they should expect during the process. In addition the parents sign in and get the necessary handout materials. The next step is the actual conference, during which the students lead their parents through the conferencing process. The class is arranged with various academic stations. One station for each academic area covered in the class. Together the parents and student visit every station. At each station the students explain the learning that has taken place in

the different academic areas and complete brief assessment task enabling the parents to see how the students perform academically. Directions can be placed at each station for the parent to check student accuracy. After completing the task, together the student and parent review the completed work and discuss the outcome. The parents may view the working portfolios simultaneously as the students and parents move through the stations or one station can be reserved exclusively for portfolio observations. If parents would like an opportunity to briefly conference with the teacher about a concern, they may have the opportunity when they finish visiting the academic stations with their child.

Evaluation. At the conclusion of the conference the parents and students complete an evaluation form that is usually created by the teacher. As Benson and Barnett (2005) suggest, the evaluation tool might include questions such as: What went well during the conference? What did you learn about your child's academics? What did you discover about yourself during the process? Which aspect of the conference did you enjoy the most? What do you think might have gone better during the conference? This evaluation tool is used to inform the teacher about the quality as well as the effectiveness of the conference. Parents as well as students are given the opportunity to share their opinions about how they viewed the student-led conference process with the teacher. The final phase of the conference process is reserved for teacher-student reviews and evaluation. The teacher reviews the parent and student evaluations and then the students along with the teacher view the parent evaluations. Together they discuss any concerns the student had about facilitating the conference.

Parental Involvement/Awareness

Parent involvement can also be considered a tremendous benefit of student-led conferences. Through the decades school communities have always welcomed parent involvement. However, through the years opportunities for communication between the home and school have changed. In the past, school districts in general were smaller and the teachers usually lived in the same community as their students. As a result, parents often saw the teachers at local venues such as the grocery store, church, or community meetings. This gave parents an opportunity to engage in frequent informal conversations about their children (Simon, 2001). In the 1960s, as school districts grew and boundaries changed many teachers were no longer living in the communities in which they taught; the growth of neighborhood schools and the schools needing teachers, caused more teachers to have to travel into other communities to teach. More families consisted of two working parents, limiting their time to communicate with the school. Consequently the lines of communication between parents and teachers changed (Canady & Seyfarth, 1979). Simon states that this decrease in informal communication between the teachers and parents resulted in an overall gap in school communication. Formal conferences ultimately replaced the frequent informal discussions in which parents and teachers used to engage.

Simon (2001) explains that these changes in parent-teacher communication prompted the work of James Cromer in dealing with parent-school partnerships. The belief was that parent involvement with students'

academics should not be overlooked but used as a valuable, important resource.

Simon asserts,

The Cromer model established by James Cromer was a way of uniting parent involvement and students' academics. His model encouraged schools to create governance management teams composed of parents, teachers, support staff, and mental health officials for the purpose of developing comprehensive plans that set goals for academic and social behavior. (p. 4)

Simon's research showed that by 1980, 90% of all U.S. school districts engaged in some type of formal conference period during which parents and teachers could discuss a child's academic progress. This is a positive advancement, because, as Krejci (2002) states, "When schools work together with families to support learning, children tend to succeed not just in school, but throughout life" (p. 4).

When reflecting on the process of conferencing parental comfort is especially important, and should be considered essential for continued communication between the home and school. "When parents view the school's climate as inviting, they become good public relations advocates for that school" (Krejci, 2002, p. 5). Unfortunately, many parents arrive at the conferences with their own perception about how their child is performing academically, which can create unnecessary anxiety. Other parents may arrive at the school nervous because they do not know what to ask the teacher or might remember a negative conference experience when they were children (Simon, 2001). As a result of this

discomfort, it can be difficult for parents to focusing on their child during a student-teacher conference.

Communication is the main reason why schools conduct traditional parent-teacher conferences. However, there are some issues that should not be forgotten when choosing to rely solely on this method. In order for the conference to be successful the parent must attend, or else the necessary communication does not occur. Another thing to consider when choosing a traditional conference is that the students are excluded from the conference and might become apprehensive about what is being said in their absence (Krejci, 2002). Many times parents enter the conference with negative information about the teacher as well as academic instruction, given to them by the student, which can cause for an unpleasant, stressful meeting for all involved. Having students present at the conference might alleviate unwarranted fears and bring about trust, comfort, and responsibility, which are necessary in order to foster future learning and success (Simon, 2001).

Hackman (1997) notes that although most parents would like to be involved in the conferencing process for their child, some parents are simply unable to attend. With the traditional parent-teacher conference model if the parent cannot attend the conference, both the parent and the child are left out. The parent does not have the opportunity to discuss the child's academic standing and the student misses out on an opportunity to inform his/her parent about his/her progress. However, by using the student-led conference model, a parent is never left out because the conference session need not be limited to

the school grounds. For the parent that cannot attend or chooses not to attend the scheduled conference time at school, the student can conduct the conference at home with the parent and if there is a post-conference evaluation sheet, the parent can complete it at home and the student can bring it back to teacher.

It is evident that conferencing opens the door for a home-school connection that leads to parent involvement. However, do parents and teachers have similar perceptions regarding parental involvement? This question was addressed in a study conducted by Smith (2008). The purpose of this study was to determine if teachers and parents have similar perceptions regarding parental involvement. As part of the study, the researcher developed a handbook to help teachers and administrators increase parent involvement, as well as a parent involvement handbook. The setting for Smith's research was a public elementary school in a major Southeastern city in the U.S. The school staff consisted of 29 credentialed teachers and 483 students attended the school.

The methodologies used were participatory action research, action inquiry research, and cultural studies. The researcher used non-probability sampling when soliciting parent participation in the survey due to the school's parents' historical lack of interest in involvement. "The difference between non probability and probability sampling is that non probability sampling does not involve *random* selection and probability sampling does" (Trochim, 2006, p.1). As a result the researcher anticipated that there would be less than 100% participation in this action research. The type of non-probability sampling chosen was the judgment sampling method for soliciting parent participation for all parents in an effort to

gain a representative sample. It was believed that this would increase the likeliness of sampling bias due to non-response. In judgment sampling, the researcher or some other “expert” uses his/her judgment in selecting the units from the population for study based on the population’s parameters. This type of sampling is appropriate when some members of the population might be more willing than others.

To conduct this research, Smith (2008) received special permission from Epstein and Salinas to use their set of surveys that are geared to gather the views of parents and teachers on parent and community involvement. Parents could participate in the surveys in various ways. They were printed in newsletters, distributed at school council meetings, parent workshops, and PTA meetings. In addition bilingual teachers translated the surveys into Spanish for Hispanic parents. The surveys contained over 39 questions that assessed the attitudes of parents concerning school and the method as well as the level of participation in the school.

The findings from this study showed that overall parent involvement was high, however, Smith (2008) identified two activities in which one third of the parents do not participate: volunteer and attend PTA/school meetings. It was thought provoking that although the study identified that one third of the parents were not volunteering at the school or attending PTA/school meetings, the overall parent involvement was still viewed as high. Although 37% of the parents stated that they spent less than one hour on homework with their child per day, 47% stated they could spend more if they received more guidance from the teachers.

In addition a large percentage of parents stated that they had time to help their students on the weekend as long as they knew what to help them with.

Participation is affected by the number of siblings in the school; also, the older the child the more likely the parent is to attend school activities. Parents of boys are more likely to just talk to their children and less likely to listen to them read a story or go to a special event at school. The research identified several discrepancies between parents and teachers' views. Eighty percent of the parents said they help with homework and only 60% of the teachers agreed.

Sixty-six percent of the parents stated that they practice skills with their child prior to a test and only 46% of the teachers agreed. Ninety-three percent of the parents stated that they check to make sure their child's homework is complete and only 61% of teachers agreed. It was evident that teachers and parents viewed the levels of involvement differently. Parents believed that their efforts were in place for the betterment of their child however, the teachers felt that the student results were not indicative of the parent's efforts. Student-led conferences are designed for parental awareness. Teachers can use student-led conferences as a bridge to connect school and home. Through participation in student-led conferences parents will be introduced to the type of work their child completes in class and become aware of the help that is needed. Together with their child they can work on educational goals and review things that can be worked on at home. As a result parents will join the teachers in knowing what is needed for their child's academic success (Bailey & Guskey, 2001).

Overall, parents in Smith's (2008) study appeared to be relatively satisfied with the extent to which the school involves them. However, there were three practices that at least 40% of the parents felt that the school did not do or could improve upon:

1. The school tells me what skills my child needs to learn each year,
 2. School explains how to check my child's homework, and
 3. The school contacts me if my child does something well or improves
- (p. 78).

In addition, parents of girls appeared to be more satisfied than parents of boys with the following aspects of school communication:

1. The school gives me information about how the report card grades are earned,
2. The school assigns homework that requires my child to talk with me about things learned in class,
3. The school asks me to volunteer at school,
4. The school asks me to help with fundraising, and
5. The school includes parents on school committees. (p. 78)

In conclusion the research showed significant discrepancies in teachers' and parents' perceptions in relation to parental involvement. If teachers believe that parents are not interested in being involved at the school, parents will be less likely to make an effort to be involved in the school. Furthermore, the study found a negative correlation between students' grades and how well the school informs the parents about what is happening in school; the study also found a

positive correlation between grades and the school informing parents about available community services (Smith, 2008). When students are having difficulties in school, community resources are usually available to assist.

Student-led conferences increase parental awareness. Unless a parent is aware of the problems, they will not seek help. In addition, according to Smith (2008), and as previously mentioned, the younger the child the less likely parents are to attend school functions. As a result when considering the implementation of student-led conferences it is important to start with the younger grades, enabling the school to benefit from early parent involvement.

William H. Jeynes currently a California State University professor in the department of education conducted a study on the effects that parent awareness/involvement have on student achievement in 2005: *Parental Involvement and Student Achievement: A Meta-Analysis*. The purpose of Jeynes' study was to determine the overall effects of parent involvement on K-12 students' academic achievement and to determine to what degree are certain types of parental involvement beneficial to children. The Meta analysis was comprised of 77 studies and of those studies 36 consisted of data from secondary schools, 25 from elementary schools and 16 had data from both elementary and secondary schools. The overall study consisted of over 300,000 students.

The study was conducted considering five basic areas dealing with parental involvement and student achievement and the results were categorized accordingly. The questions considered were:

1. How does the academic achievement of students whose parents are actively involved in their education compare to that of their counterparts whose parents are not involved?
2. What is the particular influence of specific aspects of parental involvement?
3. Which aspect of parental involvement has the greatest impact on academic achievement?
4. Do the effects of parental involvement hold for racial minority children?
5. Do parental involvement programs work? (Jeynes, 2005)

In regards to overall student achievement, the results of the meta-analysis indicate that parental involvement is directly associated with higher student achievement. These results were consistent, whether they were measured by standardized tests, teacher ratings or other measures. In addition the pattern held true for all grade levels and all students including minority students. When analyzing what aspect of parental involvement had the greatest influence on student achievement the two patterns seen were, areas that required a large investment of time such as reading and communicating with the child and 2nd the more subtle aspects such as parental style and expectations, which actually had a greater influence on educational outcomes than stringent aspects such as household rules and parental attendance and participation at school functions (Jeynes, 2005).

The results of this study showed that parental involvement, whether it is voluntary or through parental programs, has a significant influence on students

regardless of the population of the school (Jeynes, 2005). As a result schools should strive to incorporate as many strategies as possible to engage parents in their children's schooling. In conclusion, it would prove beneficial if teachers, principals and school counselors familiarized themselves with facets of parental involvement that can benefit the students the most and encourage parents to be more involved in whatever realm possible. Once parents are involved as active participants schools can then begin to help the students build their accountability.

Student Accountability

One of the best ways to instill academic accountability into students is to involve them in discussions centered on their schoolwork with their parents in an organized setting. Student-led conferences enable students to review their work, organize a presentation of their work to their parents, and discuss their learning objectives, goals, and strategies for attaining their goals with their parents (Benson & Barnett, 2005). The process of student-led conferencing requires that students internalize the results of the work they have completed, enabling them to express their outcomes to their parents while discussing their strengths and areas of needed improvement from their own perspective (Bailey & Guskey, 2001). Bailey and Guskey state:

Successful student-led conferences require changes in the roles each participant has become accustomed to through traditional parent-teacher conferences. Teachers become facilitators while students become leaders. Parents become active listeners and questioners. Support personnel such as secretaries, teaching assistants, and administrators

become active participants in the preparation and implementation of conferences. (p. 7)

Student-led conferences exemplify a change in process that warrants a change in roles. The role that students play enables them to become more responsible and thus helps to instill accountability.

Hackman (1997) identified the following five goals that help to increase student accountability as well as parental awareness. Teachers should strive to achieve each of these goals during the process of student-led conferences:

1. To encourage students to accept personal responsibility for their academic performance;
2. To teach students the process of self-evaluation;
3. To facilitate the development of students' organizational and oral communication skills and to increase self-confidence;
4. To encourage students, parents and teachers to engage in open and honest dialogue; and
5. To increase parental attendance. (p. 1)

From a teacher's perspective a relevant question often pondered is, "How can I get my students to be responsible when it comes to what they are learning and take on the role of becoming more accountable?" According to Bailey and Guskey (2001), student-led conferencing offers a proven method for increasing student accountability for learning, allowing them to take ownership over their studies. In addition, during conference time, schools are always hoping to achieve overwhelming participation by parents as well as overall satisfaction from

everyone involved. In 1996, an Iowa middle school was dissatisfied with their current parent-teacher conferencing method and decided to try a new format for the second conferencing session in the spring. According to LeCountryman and Schroeder (2006), the team of seventh grade teachers decided to read current literature on the topic of student-led conferences. The team then decided on three phases for implementation and visited schools that were currently conducting student-led conferences. The team decided on a method of communicating to the teachers and parents who would be involved and implemented student-led conferences for the first time in the spring of 1996. The Iowa schools employing the student-led conferences noted a rise in parent attendance at conferences. Additionally, students reported increased self-confidence and personal satisfaction as a result of being directly involved in the conferences. Moreover, parents began to appreciate the opportunity to strengthen the lines of communication with their children.

Lewis (2006) notes that a private Catholic school, located in the southwestern suburbs in the mid-west had been conducting goal setting student-led conferences with their fourth through eighth grade students for four years. In goal setting conferences students set their own learning goals as opposed to the teacher. Although the process was viewed as successful there was no existing data to support the effectiveness of the process. One fourth grade class was chosen to participate in this study. The class consisted of 21 students (14 girls and seven boys). The purpose of this action research study was to gather student's perceptions of student-led conferences in relation to students setting

their own goals, compared to teachers setting goals for their students. The teachers felt that assisting students in setting their own academic goals might also increase their academic achievement along with helping them to become more accountable for their learning and develop skills which would prove beneficial in their futures.

The class functioned as usual. The students set goals, completed tasks and monitored progress. In order to measure student perceptions about individualized goal setting and learning, the students were asked to provide their age, sex and number of years they have attended the school. Since this was a fourth grade class, this would be their first year participating in student-led conferences. In addition the students were asked to fill out questionnaires such as, the Student Goal Survey, which was a 14 item Likert- type instrument. The students answered various questions in order to determine the results. The results of this study indicated that students were pleased with the student-led conference format and 57% of the students were instilled with a sense of pride, being able to share their work with their parents during the conference. The perceptions of the students revealed that 85% of the students felt that their work improved as a result of participating in student-led conferences. When asked about setting their individual goals, 78% of the students felt that individualized goal setting almost always made them better students however the students also revealed that the goals they set for themselves, are not as stringent as the goals their teachers set for them.

Overall, the participating students in this study feel more responsible and motivated as a result of setting their own goals. The study also reveals the need for continued teacher and parent support in order for students to reach their optimal academic success. Through continued support with goal setting and student-led conferences the results of this study have supported the school's belief that success will be achieved at a higher rate with student-led conferences as opposed to the traditional conference format. As the researcher reviews the results of this study it appears that student accountability is a crucial entity in regards to student success and personal satisfaction. However, student-led conferences with teacher set goals might be the most advantages.

Through the aforementioned research it appears as though student accountability, provided through the student-led conference process is advantageous for any grade level. A high school senior reflects on accountability:

I have learned that I need to straighten up my act and be more organized with my work. I've learned to stand back and take a look at my work and see if it is quality work....I've learned it will take a lot more time to produce quality work, and you have to be willing to put forth the effort to get it.

(Benson & Barnett, 2005, p. 92)

Empirical Research in Support of Student-Led Conferences

When Ralston Public School teachers underwent staff development for the implementation of student-led conferences, many teachers had reservations as to whether the younger students would be able to successfully lead the conference. Dianne Young, the ELL and student services director for Ralston

Public schools in Nebraska and Lynn Behounek, the media specialist for Ralston Public Schools, decided to prove that it could be done. They first determined a tool that could assist a kindergarten student in implementing a student-led conference. Young and Behounek (2008) created a system using power-point that students could use to record and remember the information needed, regardless of their reading level. Each slide contained pertinent information with the student's recorded response, for example; what do you need to practice? What do you like in school?

Young and Behounek (2008) were confident that every phase of the power point presentation could be integrated into the classroom's daily activities. Interviews were conducted during center time and reading and math knowledge were part of the daily assignments. Presentations were practiced during literacy time. The first year the program was implemented, it took about 10 minutes for the teacher or media specialist to input the data and the second year the time was cut in half, by using a paraprofessional or school intern to input the data. In addition, the clip art used was saved and reused.

Several benefits were documented as a result of their work. The emphasis of the conference was truly on the child, there was an opportunity for parents to give feedback through provided surveys, and parents and teachers had the opportunity for further discussion if needed. In addition, they found the power-point presentations to be an excellent way for students to integrate district and state speaking standards, as well as being a visual and electronic record of progress. By implementing this program the students learned responsible

behavior about computers, while learning that the printed word, art and photography can all be used to illustrate thoughts and ideas. By practicing their student-led, power point presentation, students learned that although the work was created locally and individually, they had the ability to share their work across the nation and most important they learned that a computer is not just a big game but a way to communicate with others (Young & Behounek, 2008).

Sara Shulkind (2008), principal of Milken Community High School in Los Angeles, which serves seventh through twelfth grade students, along with her administrative team decided they wanted assessment to help students self-adjust in order to assist them in learning. In order to accomplish this task the school decided to implement student-led conferences. Prior research had revealed that assessment reports were generated by teachers or other external bodies and they were synonymous with GPAs, test scores and assessments. Milken administration and staff wanted students to reap additional benefits from their assessments. The purpose for using the student-led conferences was to give the students an opportunity to reflect on their learning and to set goals which would enable them to grow and improve.

Three years prior to the implementation of student-led conferences the school embedded an advisory program at the site to get students accustomed to trusting their advisors and having confidence that the advisors cared about them as learners. During the 2007-08 year, which was the third year of the advisory program development, the advisors took on a new role which was academic oversight. The advisors met with the students every 2 weeks to discuss

academic goals and the summer before the staff participated in mock student-led conferencing sessions. One of the schools eighth grade students was brought in to participate and play the role of a student. When the staff witnessed this student in action discussing goals, clarifying questions, and expressing learning progress and needs, all those who were not previously convinced, immediately began to rethink their beliefs (Shulkind, 2008).

During the first weeks of school, advisors continued working with the students to assist them in setting specific goals for themselves and some of the teachers simulated conferences during faculty meetings. Students wrote narratives for themselves and participated in mock conferencing sessions. In order to prepare the parents, the month prior to the conferences, Shulkin included articles on student-led conferences in the weekly bulletins. She invited parents to a coffee meeting in order to talk about ways to support their children's academic success. The coffee talk was followed up with a formal parent letter informing them of the purpose and format of the conferences which were going to be held (Shulkind, 2008).

Following the conference, advisors, parents and students were surveyed to get their opinion about the student-led conferences. The reflections immediately following the conferences were positive. Advisors recognized the value of the conferences and 86% believed that the students would benefit from the implementation of student-led conferences. The students were pleased as well. Several stated that the process helped them become more organized, while others said student-led conferences assisted them in taking goal setting and self-

assessment more serious, while others felt that their academic strengths and weaknesses were clearer and more defined. In addition, many students realized that student-led conferences helped them understand what they needed to do in order for them to improve (Shulkind, 2008). Parents were the most surprised by the results and the positive responses were confirmation for the staff:

1. "The parent conference was wonderful. I loved it, and I felt we were in complete partnership, working together to better my daughter's education."
2. "It was positive and uplifting."
3. "The conference highlighted some problem areas and allowed me as the parent together along with the advisor to figure out ways to approach them."
4. "I think the student-led conference process allowed my daughter the ability to self-reflect and realize more clearly her strengths and areas for improvement." (p. 55)

Overall the parents recognized the process as one allowing for self-assessment and helping the students learn and grow. There was a transformation of culture at Milken and the new established practices, focused on teaching students to use their minds and measure their progress in order to facilitate their own strengths. Through the student-led conference process, assessment became what Shulkind wanted it to be, the actual learning itself, a process full of intricate feedback amongst parents, students, teachers and advisors.

Center Middle School in Kansas City, Missouri, was concerned with their current traditional conferences and decided to implement student-led conferences. Center Middle School was comprised of over 400 ethnically diverse, seventh and eighth grade students (Hackman et al., 1995). The staff chose student-led conferences because they wanted to adapt a format that would:

- Encourage students to take responsibility for their academic progress
- Encourage open communication between the parents students and teachers
- Enhance student's verbal communication skills in addition to increasing self-confidence and
- Increase parent involvement at the conferences

In preparation for the change the students at Center Middle School were enrolled in a seminar class. In this class the students were encouraged to take on the responsibility for their academic success. It was instilled in the students that success is ultimately dependent on their personal efforts. At the beginning of each quarter, students along with their homeroom teacher developed an individualized plan focusing on goals. Teachers along with counselors presented classes during the seminar class to teach the students the leadership skills needed in order to facilitate the conference. Students participated in mock conferences in order to practice and gain confidence for the actual conference (Hackman et al., 1995).

Prior to the conference day the students compiled completed work which they would like to share with their parents. The students were held accountable for explaining each assignment as well as the grades received for each. In addition the students sent letters home to the parents explaining the new conference format and suggestions for topics or questions that the parents might like to ask during the conference. The conferences were scheduled in 20-minute intervals and took place during the school day as well as evening. At the conference the students shared their individualized academic plan, and described areas which they felt they were excelling in as well as areas in which they were struggling. The students shared their portfolios with their parents, which consisted of completed assignments and information sheets which included a grade from each of their classes. At the conclusion of the conference the parents received thank you notes from the students, thanking them for participating in the conference and parents were also given an opportunity to speak to the teachers if they had a concern (Hackman et al., 1995).

The evaluations after the first quarter conference of the 1994-1995 school year showed an increase in attendance from 80-90% to 93.1%. Of the 296 parents who completed the post conference survey 96% found them to be “helpful” or “somewhat helpful” in approving attendance and clarifying academics. Of the 344 students that completed the surveys 94% of the student body preferred the student-led conference format over the traditional and 97% found the student-led conference to be “helpful” or “very helpful”. Post conference surveys/questionnaires provided evidence that Center Middle School’s student-

led conference model was a huge success. As a result of the process, evidence shows that Center Middle School students are more accountable for their academics and they display more motivation when it comes to their learning (Hackman et al., 1995). Research confirms that there are many benefits to implementing student-led conferences.

Benefits Provided by Student-Led Conferences

Bailey and Guskey (2005) list five advantages associated with implementing student-led conferences:

1. Students take major responsibility for preparation and for conducting conferences,
2. Students see direct relationship between quality of daily work and report to parents,
3. Efficient use of time; teacher can schedule up to four families in one half hour,
4. Format is easily adapted for unique scheduling concerns, and
5. Parent participation is essential and often increases. (p. 16)

In addition to these advantages student-led conferences provide many additional benefits

Improved student learning. Student-led conferences can offer many benefits for students, parents and teachers. According to Bailey and Guskey (2001),

A student-led conference offers one method for increasing student responsibility for learning. Because students know they will be reporting to

parents or other significant adults on a range of topics over time, they begin to see the importance of completing work, keeping on track of work, and making sure work is done well. (pp. 2-3)

In addition, the work the students produce becomes relevant to them because they have a clear understanding of their accomplishment. According to Picciotto (1996), students who had struggled in the past could produce or share a project at the conference. Therefore, an art project or essay can reflect the student's personality and academic strength, complementing the grade indicated on the report card.

According to Laura Hayden (1998), a seventh grade communications teacher at Derby Middle School in Derby, Kansas, student-led conferences are not only valuable but also honest. Hayden states, "I find student-led conferences valuable because discussing a child's progress with the parent and the child together takes out the she said, he said, of the traditional parent-conferences and provides the student a plan for improvement" (p. 10).

Allow for clear expectations. As an effective teacher having clear expectations and establishing clear teaching and learning objectives are essential when preparing for student-led conferences. Many teachers who have used student-led conferences for several years report their most successful conferences happened as a result of setting clear learning objectives for students (Kinney, Munroe, & Sessions, 2000). Kinney et al. assert, "Helping students see the target and then hold the target still will help the students understand their

learning goals, and students are then able to reflect upon their learning and discuss their own learning progress” (p. 22).

Greater self-pride. According to Hubert (1989), student-led conferences increase students’ sense of self-pride and confidence. LeBlanc (2000) states that student-led conferences provide a learning environment in which the parent can witness first hand that their student is taking ownership of and fostering a sense of pride in his/her own learning. Students in primary grades are often quite proud to show off their work to their parents. In addition, the students are enthusiastic about having their parent’s attention and through the student-led conference process are able to hone their speaking skills, which parents enjoy seeing. Student-led conferences can take place at any grade level and although most teachers are apprehensive about the process initially, with proper preparation most students can successfully facilitate a conference (Benson & Barnett, 1999).

Bailey and Guskey (2001) cite two parents that have witnessed a greater sense of self-pride in their child first hand through student-led conferences. The first parent quite concerned about her daughter having self-esteem issues wrote:

I expected her to be nervous and uncomfortable, but she was confident and well-prepared. During the conference, she identified her strengths, and didn’t dwell on weaknesses. Conducting the conference seemed to give her confidence and I saw pride and maturity that is so rarely demonstrated by her...After the conference, it was obvious that she felt successful and very proud—justifiably so. (p.11)

Another parent wrote, “My child showed maturity, responsibility and pride. It was nice to learn about her schooling through her. A parent can really see what school is like through the eyes of a child” (p.11).

Greater depth of communication. Another benefit involves reporting to parents. Bailey and Guskey (2001) concur that student-led conferences are a way to effectively communicate student learning to parents in a detailed and direct way. When students report directly to parents, information is communicated in a form everyone can understand and use. The student becomes responsible for working with the teacher to identify strengths and learning needs, collecting evidence over time to illustrate his/her progress. Student reflection and self-evaluation are important components and benefits of student-led conferences. Teachers can use student-led conferences as an opportunity to work with students on setting academic or social goals. During the student-led conferences students can explore with parents what can be done at home to help students achieve their goals.

Organization. It is essential that teachers and students utilize organizational skills when implementing student-led conferences. Organization is a key to success, and preparing for student-led conferences give many students the opportunity to observe the positive results of using building good organizational skills. Samantha, a sixth grade student, viewed the success of her student-led conference in terms of organization: “Last night’s reflection went great. My portfolio was how I wanted to present it and I kept it in order” (Austin, 1994, p. 77). Benson and Barnett (1999) reported this parent’s remark: “I was

happy to see Ryan is becoming organized, I think this type of activity encourages focus on goals for the future” (p. 92). Benson and Barnett also reported this intermediate student’s insight: “I have learned to organize my work, set up my work in a portfolio, and present it to my parents, and present it in an orderly fashion” (Benson & Barnett, p. 92). Finally, Benson and Barnett reported this high school senior’s reflection:

I learned that I need to straighten my act up and be more organized with my work. I’ve learned to stand back and take a look at my work and see if it is quality work...I’ve learned it will take a lot of time to produce quality work, and you have to be willing to put forth the effort to get it. (Benson & Barnett, p. 92)

Motivation. It is a motivating experience for students when they have the opportunity to practice discussing their learning progress in preparation for presenting themselves to their parents. Terri Austin, a sixth grade teacher in Anchorage, Alaska, informed her students that they would be sharing their work with their parents and explaining their report cards during spring conferences. Austin reports that their attitudes instantly changed and they became extremely motivated; “some showed more effort than they had all year” (1994, p. 4). It is customary for people to perform at a higher degree when they are motivated, and according to Stiggins (2005), when teachers are able to relay clear expectations regarding students’ learning goals their motivation significantly increases.

Stronger Leadership Skills. In traditional parent-teacher conferences all of the information is delivered about the student to the parent and after the

conference the parent returns home and relays the information that was stated about the student to the student. Student-led conferences on the other hand, put the students in control. The student's role during the conference is to initiate, lead and explain. Through practice it has been reported that most children feel comfortable taking on a leadership position.

Bolman and Deal (2003) provide insight for successful leadership and identify eight sources of power for leaders. Each source can be directly related to students having leadership power through student-led conferences. Power can stem from:

1. Position
2. Information and expertise
3. Control of rewards
4. Coercive power
5. Alliance and networks
6. Access and control of agendas
7. Control of meaning and symbols
8. Personal power (pp. 194-195)

An elementary student recalls having leadership power while implementing a student-led conference. "I liked being in charge. Mom and Dad asked me questions about my work instead of asking my teacher" (Herbert, 2001, p. 96). Another student stated, "They were interested and they asked questions about my work. They listened and learned and watched" (Austin, 1994, p. 78).

Honesty. Honesty brings about some concern when considering student-led conferences. With students reporting to their parents, how accurate will the reports be? Students want their parents to be proud of them and one way of doing that is to show how successful they have been in school. However, in their study, Price and Hein (1994), prove that contrary to belief students are extremely honest when reporting to their parents about their academic achievements. Price and Hein worked with approximately 100 school districts across the United States. These school districts were actively involved in the process of science education reform and active assessments. Through their quantitative research it was found that, in general, teachers find that when students are asked to rate their work the results often agree with the teacher's.

In addition, Stiggins (2005) reports that cheating has less appeal to students when they are involved in the student-led conference process. Students are generally honest when sharing their work with parents because it is difficult to misrepresent the facts when they are holding the relevant papers in their hands. Chris Orff, a high school teacher at Noble High in North Berwick, Maine, makes reference to the benefit of student-led conferencing in relation to student integrity. Orff states that students are less likely to say, it's the teacher's fault or it's my parents fault, when they are facilitating the conference, they are compelled to be honest (Flannery, 2004). Although there is a plethora of research addressing the benefits provided by student-led conference implementation there are also some noted challenges.

Challenges Brought About by Student-Led Conferences

One of the main challenges that teachers face is the preparation that goes into preparing for a student-led conference. The work involved in setting up the conference should take place in three phases, as previously discussed: (a) preparation, (b) implementation of the conference, and (c) post-conference evaluation, according to Hackman et al. (1995) and LeCountryman and Schroeder (2006). The teacher is responsible for determining the content to be covered during the conference, the organization of the student-led conference, as well as preparing the students to implement the conference. In addition, the teacher has to oversee what the students choose to put in their portfolios. This can be a time-consuming task for teachers with a large number of students in their class.

Another challenge for teachers is allowing sufficient preparation time for students to become proficient in self-reflection and learning the actual process of leading their parent through the entire conference independently. This process must be taught, modeled, and reinforced by the teacher. Quality reflections take time, according to Kinney et al. (2000). A teacher needs sufficient time in order to allow each student time to reflect and respond thoughtfully.

A challenge for parents is that they do not want to disappoint their child in the event that they cannot attend the conference at school although the conference can be conducted at home. Students put a lot of preparation into planning and look forward to sharing the experience with their parents, in front of

their teacher. A parent's failure to attend can lead to a huge disappointment for the student.

After the student-led conference has taken place, many parents are left not knowing what the next step should be. Unfortunately, this happens with the traditional conference format as well. However, since student-led conferences leave the parents knowing where their child is academically, at that given point, they only have to decide where to go next. The challenge will be for the parent to work with the child and the teacher to set new goals based on the conference (Hubert, 1989). In addition, parents feel that during student-led conferences they cannot talk privately with their child's teacher about any concerns they have about their child (LeBlanc, 2000). Many feel uncomfortable having to discuss their child's performance with the child present. As previously mentioned, following the student-led conference there is time for parents to meet individually with the teacher if needed. If discomfort is an issue this portion could be conducted like a traditional conference and have the student wait outside the door or in an adjoining classroom.

Summary

There are multiple factors that influence student achievement including School Factors, Teacher factors and Student factors per Marzano's (2003), *What Works in Schools*. All three factors are important and important for educators to address. Schools must have a curriculum available that meets the needs of all students while providing them with challenging goals and relevant feedback. There must be opportunities for parents to be active participants at the school

and the school must have a safe environment and function in a professional manner. Teachers must have classroom management in place; instructional strategies geared for student success and know how to structure lessons with the proper amount of repetition and advancement to meet the needs of the students. Students must be motivated and parents must show a consistent interest in their child's academics.

There have been various types of parent-teacher conferences utilized in schools to inform parents of the progress that their child is making in school, however these conferences have not always engaged students in their academic development, encouraged parental awareness or necessarily improved student factors: home atmosphere, learned intelligence and background or motivation. Student-led conferences represent a contemporary alternative to traditional parent-teacher conferences by making the students active participants in the conference. Through their participation and facilitation of the conference they have become more accountable for their academic outcomes and motivated to learn. Parents are more aware of their child's academic performance and the lines of communication between the parents and students in relation to school have improved.

Recent studies of student-led conferences had revealed many benefits including: improved student learning; clearer expectations; greater self-pride; greater depth of communication; organization; motivation; stronger leadership skills and honesty. Studies have also revealed challenges including: teacher preparation time, parents not wanting to disappoint their child by not being able

to attend the conference, and parents leaving the conference not knowing what the next step should be. However, this is evident in traditional conferences as well. Although there are challenges the benefits have appeared to outweigh the challenges and opportunity exists to further study student-led conferences as a means for connecting home and school by increasing academic communication between parents and students, increasing parental awareness in regards to student academic performance and increasing student accountability and motivation. As Henderson and Berla (1994) state, "When schools work together with families to support student learning, children tend to succeed not just in school, but throughout life" (p. 1).

Chapter 3: Methods

Overview

The purpose of this concurrent multiple methods study was to inform the work at OCS related to elementary student-led conferences in grades kindergarten through third grade during the 2009-2010 school year, by exploring OCS elementary parent perceptions regarding the benefits, if any, of student-led conferences. In addition, the purpose of the study was to explore parent perceptions about how, if at all, student-led conferences have influenced parent awareness of K-3 student academic performance in content areas, communication between parents and students in regards to school, parental expectations and parenting style, as well as the influence student-led conferencing has had on student motivation and accountability.

Research Questions

The following questions guided this study:

1. What do parents of current first -fourth grade elementary students at Ontario Christian School who have participated in student-led conferences prior to the current 2010-11 academic year perceive to be the benefits, if any, of student-led conferences?
2. What are the perceptions of current Ontario Christian School first -fourth grade parents who have participated in student-led conferences prior to the current 2010-11 academic year, as to how, if at all, student-led conferences have influenced communication between parents and students regarding school, parental expectations, and parenting style?

3. What are the perceptions of current Ontario Christian School first - fourth grade parents who have participated in student-led conferences prior to the current 2010-2011 academic year, as to how, if at all, student-led conferences have influenced student academic performance in content areas, student motivation, student success orientation, and achievement?

Research Design Overview

This concurrent multiple methods study proposed to explore the perceptions of parents of current first through fourth grade students at OCS, who participated in student-led conferences prior to the current 2010-2011 academic year, as to the benefits, if any, of student-led conferences through the administration of a quantitative survey (Appendix A) in which parents were asked to give a 5-1 Likert rating response to 12 structured statements. Concurrently, the same parents were administered a qualitative questionnaire (Appendix B), and invited to respond to 6 semi-structured questions that explored parent perceptions, as to the influence, if any, that student-led conferences have on communication about school, parental expectations, parenting style, student's academic performance, student motivation and student accountability. Finally, parents who provided permission to be contacted in relation to their questionnaire responses and for whom the researcher determined a need to interview for response clarification were invited to participate in a follow-up interview. Interview statements/questions were:

(a) Please explain further your response to question x, (b) What did you mean specifically by your response to question x?, and (c) Please give an example of what you meant by your response to question x.

Research design rationale. According to Morse and Richards (2002) in multiple-method research, the two (or more) projects may both be quantitative, both qualitative, or one qualitative and one quantitative. Both projects are complete in themselves and because the projects are independent, it is the results that are combined in multiple-method research, not the data, nor the analysis. Therefore, multiple-method research escapes some of the quandaries of mixed method research with regards to the provision of appropriate and adequate samples and the transformation of data for analysis. Simply put, the results are combined in the process of writing in the form and format that will provide the reader with understanding.

The researcher chose the concurrent multiple methods approach as most appropriate for this study because both quantitative and qualitative methods were needed to address the study purpose and research questions. “Quantitative research was used to answer questions about relationships among measured variables with the purpose of explaining, predicting, and controlling phenomena” (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005, p. 94). A quantitative survey (Appendix A) was used to address research question #1 in order to determine the parent’s perceptions in regards to the benefits provided by student-led conferences. A quantitative survey was the best strategy for investigating research question #1 because benefits of student-led conferences had already been established through prior

research and the researcher's effort was to determine what parents perceived as the most beneficial aspects of student-led conferences.

A qualitative questionnaire (Appendix B) was selected to address questions #2 and #3. "Qualitative research is typically used to answer questions about the complex nature of phenomena, often with the purpose of describing and understanding the phenomena, from the participant's point of view" (Leedy and Ormrod, 2005, p. 94). Qualitative design was the best approach for research questions #2 and #3 because the researcher wanted to understand parent perceptions in detail, in regards to various areas associated with student-led conferences. Perceptions were gathered through the use of an open-ended questionnaire (Appendix B). Open-ended questionnaire is a term used to describe a series of questions that do not lead to a single right answer (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). Through the use of open-ended questions the researcher had the opportunity to understand participants' perceptions of student-led conferences and their awareness of their children's academic performance in content areas, student motivation, and accountability.

A follow-up semi-structured interview (Appendix C), was the last instrument proposed to be used by the researcher for data collection. A semi-structured interview designed for research followed the standard questions with one or more individually tailored questions to get clarification or probe a person's reasoning (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). This strategy was chosen because the researcher wanted to reserve the opportunity to clarify any answers that might require clarification. In addition, according to Leedy and Ormrod (2005), when

conducting qualitative research it is a good strategy to collect data using different kinds of data. By conducting follow-up interviews the researcher would be able to elicit more detailed responses allowing for more efficiency when analyzing the data. Interview responses were to be gathered and used only as a supplemental component to the questionnaire, and for clarification of initial questionnaire responses only.

Sampling Method and Sample Participants

The school chosen by the researcher for this study was a Christian pre-kindergarten through eighth grade school located in Ontario, California. The researcher used the Internet to seek out schools located in southern California that had implemented student-led conferences and were planning on implementing them during the 2010-2011 school years. The researcher chose OCS because they had implemented student-led conferences for more than three years and the staff and administration had deemed them beneficial. Furthermore, OCS was a respected Christian school in the community. The researcher's first conversation with the principal, Mr. Keith Lucas, took place over the phone. The researcher discussed the intended study and engaged the principal in a casual conversation about student-led conferences using literature-based research. As the conversation progressed, the researcher found that the principal shared many of the same views about student-led conferences as several prominent researchers on the subject. The principal invited the researcher to come to the school and discuss the actual study proposal in greater depth. The principal was especially motivated to support the study

because of the opportunity it presented to share data with the staff regarding parent perceptions about student-led conferences. Mr. Lucas not only had the desire for the school to succeed but also wanted the parents to know that their opinions are valued. The researcher informed the principal that the results of the study would be available for him to share with his staff, which could help validate his decision to continue encouraging teachers to implement student-led conferences. The principal was intrigued with the study. OCS had four classes in each grade from kindergarten through sixth grades, and the class size ranged from 20-21 students per class. During the 2009-2010 school year all kindergarten – third grade classes participated in student-led conferences. The sample population was drawn from parents with students in grades one through four during the 2010-2011 school year who had participated in student-led conferences during the 2009-2010 school year. Kindergarten classes were excluded because those classes had not participated in student-led conferencing prior to data collection. Fifth and sixth grade classes were also excluded because the sampling would be too small.

Human Subjects Considerations

All OCS elementary parents of students in grades one through four during the 2010-2011 school year, who participated in student-led conferences were considered for this study: approximately 300 parents. During the 2009-2010 academic year all kindergarten-third grade elementary-level teachers at OCS implemented student-led conferences. This was about 40% of the elementary classes. Parents were asked to indicate the current grade level of their child and

the number of student-led conferences they engaged in with that child, prior to the 2010-2011 academic year on their survey and questionnaire packet. The instruments were delivered to the school principal who made certain that the survey and questionnaires were sent home to parents who had previously participated in student-led conferences. The classroom teachers gave the packets to the students to take home. The parents were asked to complete one survey and one questionnaire for each student that brought one home. The survey consisted of 12 statements which parents scored using a 5-1 Likert Scale regarding the benefits of student-led conferences. The accompanying questionnaire consisted of six open-ended questions which were used to gather parent perceptions on the influence that student-led conferences have had on communication between parents and students regarding school, parental expectations, parenting style, academic performance in content areas, student motivation, and student accountability. Parents had 1 week to return the completed survey and questionnaire. Packets were placed in the envelopes provided, sealed and returned to the classroom teacher. The teachers then took the envelopes to the office and placed them in a box labeled "Student-led conferences." The box remained on the secretary's desk which was not easily accessible. The researcher collected the completed packets from the office once a day. In addition the researcher had planned to conduct follow-up research through telephone interviews. These telephone interviews were to be used for questionnaire clarification purposes would only be conducted with parents that

volunteered to give the researcher contact information for the possibility of follow-up interviews.

Informed consent. A permission letter (Appendix D) was given to the principal and permission was granted. Following IRB approval and prior to conducting this study parents were informed that their participation was strictly voluntary and a letter of informed consent was included as part of the survey packet.

Confidentiality. The researcher kept all data confidential and no information was or will be given to the public that can be linked directly to the participants. All information regarding the identity of the participants chosen for the study was kept confidential and locked in a file cabinet which was used only by the researcher. Once the data analysis began all word documents and statistical data was be stored in the researcher's computer which could only be opened by a code which was known only by the researcher. All data will be destroyed after three years.

Instrumentation

The researcher created the quantitative survey instrument in this study (Appendix A). The first portion of the survey requested background information about the subjects; the grade level of their child and the number of student-led conferences they participated in with that child. The second portion of the survey was used as a means of determining parent perceptions regarding the benefits, if any, provided by the student-led conferencing format as related to the research. The survey consisted of 12 statements related to the perceived benefits of

student-led conferences (see Table 1). Table 1 shows the research literature sources for the structured survey statements.

Table 1

Research Literature Sources for Structured Survey Statements

Benefit	Statements	Cited Research
Increase in the Home School Connection	1. I have a greater depth of communication with my child's school as a result of student-led conferencing.	Allan, 1989; Austin, 1994; Bailey & Guskey, 2001; Benson & Barnett, 2005
Parent Attendance at conferences	2. Student-led conferencing encourages my attendance at conferences.	Flannery, 2004; Hackman et al., 1995; Hubert, 1989; Kinney, Munroe & Sessions, 2000; Krejci, 2002; Picciotto, 1996; Price & Hein, 1994; Simon, 2001; Stiggins, 2005
Student Accountability	3. Student-led conferencing helps my child understand the importance of self-evaluation.	Bailey & Guskey, 2001
	4. Student-led conferencing helps my child understand the importance of good work habits (completing work, listening to direction etc.	
	5. Student-led conferencing helps my child in understanding their academic achievements.	
	6. Student-led conferences help provide my child with clearer expectations.	Kinney, Munroe & Sessions, 2000
	7. Student-led conferencing helps my child gain greater self-pride in their work.	Kinney, Munroe & Sessions, 2000; LeBlanc, 2000
	8. Student-led conferencing encourages honesty in my child when reporting academic results to me.	Bailey & Guskey, 2001; Hubert, 1989; LeBlanc, 2000

(table continues)

Benefit	Statements	Cited Research
Student Organization	9. My child's organization skills have increased as a result of student-led conferencing	Benson & Barnett, 1999
	10. My child displays more motivation as a result of student-led conferencing.	Austin, 2004; Stiggins, 2005
	11. I see an improvement in my child's leadership skills as a result of student-led conferencing.	Stiggins, 2005
Parent Awareness	12. Student-led conferencing helps me to become more aware of my child's academic progress and areas in which my child needs to improve.	Benson & Barnett, 1999; Flannery, 2004; Hackman et al., 1995; Hurbert, 1989; Kinney, Munroe, & Sessions, 2000; Krejci, 2002; Picciotto, 1996; Price & Hein, 1994; Simon, 2001; Stiggins, 2005

Parents rated their responses using a score of 5-1. A response of 5 meant that the parent strongly agreed with the statement and a response of 1 meant that the parent strongly disagreed with the statement. Once the data were collected the researcher tallied the results and used statistical analysis in order to draw conclusions.

The instrumentation used for the qualitative portion of the study was a questionnaire (Appendix B) using 6 semi-structured open-ended questions. The researcher chose to use semi-structured open-ended questions in order to collect parent perceptions related to their awareness of academic performance, parental expectations, parenting style, communication about school, student motivation and student accountability. Table 2 shows the research literature sources for the semi-structured questionnaire questions.

Table 2

Research Literature Sources for Semi-Structured Questionnaire Questions

Theme	Questionnaire	Cited Research
Parental awareness in regards to academic progress	1. How, if at all, have student-led conferences influenced your child's achievement and performance?	Bailey & Guskey, 2001; Gismondi, 2009; Herbert, 2001; Krejci, 2002; Simon, 2001; Smith, 2008
Influence of parental expectations	2. How, if at all, have student-led conferences influenced your parental expectations?	Bailey & Guskey, 2001; Gismondi, 2009; Herbert, 2001; Krejci, 2002; Simon, 2001; Smith, 2008
Change in parenting style	3. How, if at all, have student-led conferences influenced your parenting style when dealing with issues related to your child's academic performance?	Bailey & Guskey, 2001; Gismondi, 2009; Herbert, 2001; Krejci, 2002; Simon, 2001; Smith, 2008
Communication	4. How, if at all, have student-led conferences influenced communication about school between you and your child?	Bailey & Guskey, 2001; Krejci, 2002; Moore, 2003; Simon, 2001
Parental awareness in regards to student motivation and accountability	5. How, if at all, have student-led conferences influenced student motivation at school?	Bailey & Guskey, 2001; Benson & Barnett, 1999; Flannery, 2004; LeBlanc, 2000; Simon, 2001; Stiggins, 2005
Parental awareness in regards to student motivation and accountability	6. How, if at all, have student-led conferences influenced your child's accountability, in regards to their academic outcomes at school?	Bailey & Guskey, 2001; Little & Allan, 1989; Simon, 2001

The structured survey and semi-structured questionnaire were the primary instruments in data collection. Follow-up interviews were to address only

questionnaire responses and were planned to be used only to clarify answers or elicit additional answers as needed. See Appendix C for follow-up interview questions. For example if a parent felt that his/her child was more accountable as a result of student-led conferences and did not elaborate on the ways in which the child was demonstrating increased accountability, the researcher might have asked the parent to provide more details (see Table 3 for a complete list of follow-up questions).

Table 3

Semi-structured Follow-up Interview Questions/Statements

Nature of Question	Interview Questions/Statements
To elicit more detail	Please explain further your response to question x.
To target reasoning for the given answer	What did you mean specifically by your response to question x?
To elicit further clarification	Please give an example of what you meant by your response to question x.

Validity and Trustworthiness

The validity of the methodology of this study was decided upon from an extensive review of literature on student-led conferences. The quantitative aspect of this study was to gather parent perceptions of the benefits, if any, of student-led conferences. The qualitative aspect of this study was based on parent perspectives of the influences, if any, student-led conferences have had on communication between parents and students about school, parental expectations, parenting style, academic performance, student motivation and

student accountability. The survey and open-ended questionnaire were created by the researcher. As a guideline for creating instruments, the researcher searched for surveys and questionnaires on the topic of student-led conferences. Bailey and Guskey (2001) had two instruments that proved beneficial for reviewing relevant content as well as organization. One instrument was a behavior and work habits survey designed for students to complete after participating in a student-led conference. The second instrument the researcher deemed useful contained suggested questions for parents to ask their child during a student-led conference. Both instruments helped to provide the researcher guidance in creating original instruments. Benson and Barnett (2005) also had various student-led conference evaluation tools which provided guidance in addition to an array of reflection worksheets which helped provide clarity for the researcher when formulating appropriate questions. Unfortunately, the researcher was unable to find a survey or questionnaire that could be used for this particular study. As a result the researcher created one survey and one questionnaire.

In order to establish the validity of the survey as well as the open-ended questionnaire the researcher solicited a panel of three professional practitioners who had implemented student-led conferences with their elementary classes for at least five years. All three professional practitioners had worked at the elementary level for over 10 years. These practitioners were used to help clarify whether the instruments were clear and organized in a manner that would generate answers which would be beneficial to the study. In order to obtain

honest opinions and recommendations, the experts were given the instruments (Appendices A and B), and a survey and questionnaire feedback form (Appendix E), in person with a self-addressed stamped envelope addressed to the researcher. This was done in order to allow the practitioners to respond honestly, knowing that their responses would be confidential and could not be linked to them in any way. In the event that they had negative comments, the researcher believed the practitioners would be more apt to provide them with this procedure in place. The practitioners reviewed content, organization, and format of survey statements and questionnaire questions to ensure that the instruments fully and appropriately addressed the research study questions. Once the researcher received feedback from the practitioners, comments were evaluated and recommendations for changes were considered. All three respondents noted that there were two questions related to attendance on the survey, one read: Student-led conferencing encourages my attendance at conferences. The other read: My attendance improved as a result of student-led conferences. The consensus was that one question related to attendance was sufficient. As a result the researcher eliminated: My attendance improved as a result of student-led conferences. In addition, two of the practitioners noted two questions they thought could be combined. One statement was on academic progress: Student-led conferences help me to become more aware of my child's academic progress. The other was on academic areas in need of improvement: Student-led conferencing allows me to understand academic areas in which my child needs to improve. After re-evaluating the survey the researcher made the

decision to combine the two questions into one: Student-led conferences help me to become more aware of my child's academic progress and areas in which my child needs to improve. There were no suggestions given for the questionnaire. The overall responses validated the survey and questionnaire as being easily understood with clear and concise directions. The consensus was that the survey and questionnaire combined should elicit the data necessary for a thorough study. Two practitioners stated a completion time of 10 minutes to complete the survey and questionnaire, and the other practitioner gave a completion time of 20 minutes. The discrepancy in completion time could be related to the amount of information a subject decides to include on the open-ended questionnaire.

The researcher then conducted a pilot study using the edited version of the survey and questionnaire with five parents the researcher knew personally. All five of these parents had previously participated in student-led conferences on the elementary level. The pilot was conducted electronically with the researcher e-mailing the instruments and feedback form (Appendix F) to the parents and having them e-mailed back to the researcher upon completion. The results from the pilot survey were as follows: Four out of five parents (pilot participants), viewed the statement referring to communication about school and home school connection as redundant. The parent's belief was that both statements would receive the same response. The two statements in question were: (a) I have a greater depth of communication with my child in regards to school work as a result of student-led conferencing; (b) Student-led conferencing helps to increase

the home school connection. The four pilot participants thought that the question about home school connection should be eliminated because open communication, attendance, as well as increased awareness all deal with the home school connection. In lieu of the comments the statement which read, Student-led conferencing helps to increase the home school connection was eliminated. The parent (pilot participant) that did not comment on the two statements as being redundant answered both statements with the same score. All of the pilot participants felt that the directions for the survey and questionnaire were clear; the statements and questions were easy to understand; the survey did an excellent job identifying the benefits and the overall responses and the questionnaire would elicit the responses needed to receive a thorough sampling of parent perceptions of student-led conferences. The results of the pilot helped to assure the researcher that the instruments created would be successful in obtaining the research information needed in order to adequately answer the research questions. Administration of the survey, questionnaire, and possible follow-up interview questions were approved by Pepperdine IRB.

Data Collection Setting and Procedures

Prior to conducting any research the researcher's first step was to obtain permission from the school administrator. A telephone conversation took place between the researcher and the principal, who was intrigued by the idea of having the study conducted with the parents at his school site. A formal face-to-face meeting was scheduled where the study was explained in detail and information was shared about the school. The principal was happy to grant

permission for the study to take place at his school site and dates for collection data were discussed. Following the face-to-face meeting, the researcher sent the principal a formal letter asking for his written consent to conduct the study at his school site. The researcher then wrote a letter to the teachers informing them of the proposed research which would possibly be conducted through their classes with the principal's permission.

The participant's perceptions were evaluated through the use of a survey, a questionnaire, and a possible follow-up interview designed for clarification if needed. Quantitative design was used as a means for collecting, analyzing, interpreting and recording the results of the study. A quantitative research tool was used to test and examine the relationship among the variables in this study. The researcher understood that by learning the perceptions and perspectives of the participants in the study, the researcher as well as the readers would in turn become aware of the perceived benefits, if any, of holding student-led conferences at OCS and possibly other elementary schools

Next, the researcher completed the necessary steps in order to obtain IRB approval. As Leedy and Ormrod (2005) state in their book, *Practical Research, Planning and Design*, any research study conducted should respect its participants' privacy. "In the United States, any college, university, or research institution will have an internal review board (IRB) that scrutinizes all proposals for conducting human research under the auspices of the institution" (p. 102). Since this study involved the participation of human subjects, the researcher needed to obtain IRB approval in order to collect data and conduct action

research on the school campus. While waiting on IRB approval the researcher once again met with the principal and reviewed the proposed procedures that would be conducted at the school and the time frame in which the research would be completed. Following IRB approval data collection began.

Classroom teachers sent surveys and questionnaires home to all parents who had participated in student-led conferences. Willing participants filled the forms out and returned them to the classroom teacher, in a sealed envelope. A few parents also volunteered to be contacted by the researcher for follow-up questions, as needed. Each teacher returned completed surveys and questionnaires to the main office and placed them in a box labeled student-led conferences provided by the researcher. The box remained on the secretary's desk which was not easily accessible. Participants were given one week to return completed surveys and questionnaires and the researcher collected the completed surveys and questionnaires once a day from the school. Student and parents were given a token of appreciation when they returned the survey and questionnaire. The parents received a 2011 pocket calendar (Appendix G) and the students received a sticker and pencil (Appendix H).

Data Analysis

For the quantitative aspect of this study all parents with students who were currently in grades first through fourth and had participated in student-led conferences prior to the 2010-2011 academic year were given a researcher-created survey (Appendix A). This survey was used to gather the parents' perceptions by asking them to respond to 12 selected statements. According to

Leedy and Ormrod (2005), the ultimate goal of survey research is to learn about a large population by surveying a sample of that population. In addition a quantitative study ends with confirmation or disconfirmation of the hypothesis that was being tested. In this section of the study the researcher was seeking to determine if parent perceptions of the proposed benefits of student-led conferencing correlated with the literature on student-led conferencing benefits. The researcher then tabulated the survey responses and entered the responses into a statistical analysis data program called NCSS (Number Cruncher Statistical Software). By studying a sampling of parents OCS was able to clearly identify what parents perceive as the benefits of implementing student-led conferences.

For the qualitative aspect of this study all parents with students in grades first through fourth who had participated in student-led conferences prior to the 2010-2011 academic year were given a researcher-created questionnaire (Appendix B). The questionnaire consisted of six open-ended questions which were used to ascertain parent perceptions of how student-led conferences have influenced their awareness about various school-related areas. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2005), qualitative research is often conducted with the purpose of describing and understanding the phenomena from a participant's point of view using questions as a guide. In order to analyze this data the researcher used Creswell's (1998) data analysis spiral approach. First data were organized by categorizing large groups into smaller ones. Next, findings were entered into computer-generated spreadsheets and the researcher continued to

analyze and regroup data as needed. Finally, tables were created along with a final word document for readers. The follow-up interview (Appendix C) aspect of this study was also qualitative and analyzed in the same manner as the questionnaire. In addition, the researcher invited an ELAP colleague, experienced in the area of qualitative coding and analysis, which was approved by the chair, to conduct a separate analysis of questionnaire data so the researcher could compare the findings and eliminate any researcher biases. All data collected in this study were analyzed for whole group results only and the researcher compared data by grade level and by the number of experiences that parents had with the same child.

Summary

Chapter 3 presented the methodology that was used to conduct this study and analyze the results. It discussed the research design, study population, human subject considerations, data collection procedures, instrumentation, and provided tables showing the research literature sources for structured survey statements and semi-structured questionnaire questions. This chapter also included an explanation of data collection procedures and how the research data was analyzed. A detailed description of the findings will be presented in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Results of the Study

Restatement of the Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this concurrent multiple methods study was to inform the work at Ontario Christian School (OCS) related to elementary student-led conferences (SLCs) in grades kindergarten through third grade during the 2009-2010 school year. This study accomplished this task by exploring OCS elementary students' parents' perceptions regarding the benefits, if any, of SLCs. In addition, this study explored parent perceptions about how, if at all, SLCs have influenced parent awareness of kindergarten-third grade student academic performance in content areas, communication between parents and students in regards to school, parental expectations and parenting style, as well as the influence, if any, SLCs have had on student motivation and accountability.

Restatement of Research Questions

The following questions guided this study:

1. What do parents of current first-fourth grade elementary students at Ontario Christian School who have participated in student-led conferences prior to the current academic year 2010-11 school year, perceive to be the benefits, if any, of student-led conferences?
2. What are the perceptions of current Ontario Christian School first-fourth grade parents, who have participated in student-led conferences prior to the current 2010-2011 academic year, as to how, if at all, student-led conferences have influenced communication between

parents and students regarding school, parental expectations, and parenting style?

3. What are the perceptions of current Ontario Christian School first-fourth grade parents, who have participated in student-led conferences prior to the current 2010-2011 academic year, as to how, if at all, student-led conferences have influenced student academic performance in content areas, student motivation, and student accountability?

Review of Research Design

In October 2010 a concurrent multiple methods study was conducted to explore the perceptions of parents of first-fourth grade students at OCS who had participated in SLCs prior to the 2010-2011 academic year regarding the benefits, if any, of student-led conferences. The study was conducted through the administration of a quantitative survey in which parents were asked to give a 5-1 Likert rating response to 12 structured statements. The same parents were also administered a qualitative questionnaire that invited them to respond to six semi-structured questions exploring parent perceptions about the influence, if any, that SLCs have on communication about school, parental expectations, parenting style, student's academic performance, student motivation, and student accountability. The surveys and questionnaires were put together in packets that the classroom teacher sent home with students (one set per parent). The school principal, Mr. Keith Lucas, distributed the packets to the teachers. Incentives were provided for students whose parents completed the surveys and for the

parents themselves. Students were given a sticker and a pencil and parents were given a decorative writing pen upon completion and return of their survey and questionnaire set. During the research collection period, teachers reminded the students to return the surveys/questionnaires and the principal sent three message reminders to the parents through an automated school telephone message center. A total of 198 survey/questionnaire sets were distributed and 69 completed surveys/questionnaires were returned. Table 4 presents the distribution and return data of the survey respondents.

Table 4

Summary of Parent Survey Respondents

Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage
# of Surveys Distributed = 198	69	34.8%
# Distributed in 1st grade = 1	1	100%
# Distributed in 2nd grade = 64	23	35.9%
# Distributed in 3rd grade = 77	12	16.9%
# Distributed in 4th grade = 56	32	57.1%

Research Question 1 Findings

Research Question 1 asked: What do parents of current first-fourth grade elementary students at Ontario Christian School who have participated in student-led conferences prior to the current academic year 2010-11 school year, perceive to be the benefits, if any, of student-led conferences? Parent responses to quantitative survey statements 1-12 were used to answer research question #1. Responses were recorded using a Likert scale of 5-1. A response of 5

indicated that the respondent strongly agreed with the statement, a response of 4 indicated that the respondent agreed with the statement, a response of 3 represented undecided, a response of 2 represented disagreement, and a response of 1 represented strong disagreement. Tables 5-16 present the responses for each survey statement, broken down by grade level, as well as the overall number of responses in each category and the overall response percentage.

Greater communication. Table 5 reflects parent responses to statement 1: I have a greater communication with my child in regards to schoolwork as a result of student-led conferencing.

Table 5

Statement 1 Responses

Response	Grade				Total responses	Total %
	First	Second	Third	Fourth		
5 (strongly agree)	1	0	0	2	3	4.35%
4 (agree)	0	12	7	17	36	52.17%
3 (undecided)	0	3	2	6	11	15.94%
2 (disagree)	0	8	4	6	18	26.09%
1 (strongly disagree)	0	0	0	1	1	1.45%

Table 5 shows that the majority of parent respondents (39, 56.52%) reported that they agreed or strongly agreed that SLCs provided greater communication with their child in regards to school work. Nineteen parents

(27.54%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement and 11 parents (15.94%) were undecided.

An analysis of parent responses by grade level revealed that one first grade parent (100%), 12 second grade parents (52.1%), seven third grade parents (53.8%), and 17 fourth grade parents (53.1%) agreed or strongly agreed that SLCs promoted greater communication with students in regards to school work. A greater number and percentage of fourth grade parents were undecided (6, 18%) as compared to second grade parents (3, 13%) and third grade parents (2, 15%). In terms of parents who disagreed or strongly disagreed, eight second grade parents (34.8%), four third grade parents, (30.8%) and seven fourth grade parents (21.9%) did not perceive SLCs as a means for promoting greater communication with their child in regards to school work. The majority of parent respondents (39, 56.52%) reported that SLCs provided greater communication with their child in regards to schoolwork.

Conference attendance. Table 6 reflects parent responses to statement 2: Student-led conferencing encourages my attendance at conferences.

Table 6

Statement 2 Responses

Response	Grade				Total responses	Total %
	First	Second	Third	Fourth		
5 (strongly agree)	1	6	3	8	18	26.09%
4 (agree)	0	5	5	10	20	28.9%
3 (undecided)	0	2	0	2	4	5.79%

2 (disagree)	0	7	1	9	17	24.64%
1 (strongly disagree)	0	3	4	3	10	14.49%

Table 6 shows that the majority of respondents (55.08%) either agreed or strongly agreed that SLCs encouraged conference attendance. Twenty seven parents (39.13%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that SLCs encouraged parent attendance and four parents (5.79%) were undecided.

When analyzing parent responses by grade level, the results indicated that the one first grade parent (100%) strongly agreed that SLCs encouraged attendance. Eleven second grade parents (15.9%) agreed or strongly agreed, as did eight third grade parents (11.6%). Fourth grade parents (26%) represented the second largest percentage of parents who agreed with statement 2. An equal number of second and fourth grade parents (two parents for each grade level or 0.03%) were undecided as to whether SLCs encouraged parent attendance at conferences. Twenty-seven (39.1%) of the respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed with statement number 2. When reviewing these results by grade level, 10 (14.5%) second grade parents, five (7.2%) third grade parents, and 12 (17.4%) fourth grade parents either disagreed or strongly disagreed. The majority of parents (38, 55%) perceived SLCs as having an influence on parent attendance at conferences.

Self-evaluation. Table 7 reflects parent responses to statement 7: Student-led conferencing helps my child understand the importance of self-evaluation. Over two-thirds of the respondents (49, 71%) either agreed or

strongly agreed that student-led conferencing helped their child understand the importance of self-evaluation. A total of 14 parents (20.29%) were undecided with this statement and only six (8.7%) disagreed.

Table 7

Statement 3 Responses

Response	Grade				Total responses	Total %
	First	Second	Third	Fourth		
5 (strongly agree)	0	6	2	13	21	30.43%
4 (agree)	1	8	7	12	28	40.58%
3 (undecided)	0	7	3	4	14	20.29%
2 (disagree)	0	2	1	3	6	8.70%
1 (strongly disagree)	0	0	0	0	0	0%

An analysis of parent responses by grade level revealed that all first grade parents (one, 100%) agreed that SLCs help children understand the importance of self-evaluation. Fourteen (20.3%) second grade parents, nine (13.0%) third grade parents and 25 (36.2%) fourth grade parents agreed or strongly agreed that children better understood self-evaluation following SLCs. Two (0.3%) second grade parents, 1 (0.1%) third grade parent and three (4.3%) fourth grade parents disagreed with the assertion that SLCs helped children understand the importance of self-evaluation. A total of 14 parents (seven (10.1%) second grade parents, three (4.3%) third grade parents, and four (5.78%) fourth grade parents) were undecided. None of the parents strongly disagreed. Fourth grade parents

had the highest percentage in agreement with statement 3. The majority of parent respondents (71%) agreed that SLCs help students understand the importance of self-evaluation.

Good work habits. Table 8 reflects parent responses to statement 4: Student-led conferencing helps my child understand the importance of good work habits (completing work, listening to directions, etc).

Table 8

Statement 4 Responses

Response	Grade				Total responses	Total %
	First	Second	Third	Fourth		
5 (strongly agree)	1	4	3	10	18	26.09%
4 (agree)	0	7	7	10	24	34.78%
3 (undecided)	0	7	1	5	13	18.84%
2 (disagree)	0	5	2	7	14	20.29%
1 (strongly disagree)	0	0	0	0	0	0%

According to the findings for statement 4, 42 (60.87%) a majority of the parent respondents at OCS agreed or strongly agreed that SLCs helped students understand the importance of good work habits. A little over 20% disagreed and 13 (18.8%) were undecided.

An analysis of grade level responses indicated that the one (100%) first grade parent strongly agreed that SLCs help students understand the importance of good work habits. Eleven (11%) second grade parents, ten (76.9%) third grade parents, and 20 (63%) fourth grade parents agreed that SLCs have a

positive influence on children understanding the importance of work habits. Five (21.7%) second grade parents, two (15.4%) third grade parents, and seven (21.9%) fourth grade parents, disagreed with this statement; no parents strongly disagreed. However, seven (30.4%) second grade parents (the highest percentage across grade levels), one (0.7%) third grade parent and five (15.6%) fourth grade parents were undecided as to the influence SLCs have on a child's overall understanding of the importance of work habits. The majority of parents (60.87%) agreed that student-led conferencing does help children to understand the importance of good work habits.

Academic achievement. Table 9 reflects parent responses to the statement 5: Student-led conferencing helps my child understand their academic achievements.

Table 9

Statement 5 Responses

Response	Grade				Total responses	Total %
	First	Second	Third	Fourth		
5 (strongly agree)	1	4	3	9	17	24.64%
4 (agree)	0	13	7	16	36	52.17%
3 (undecided)	0	2	2	3	7	10.14%
2 (disagree)	0	3	1	4	8	11.59%
1 (strongly disagree)	0	1	0	0	1	1.45%

Table 9 indicates that 76.8% of participants either agreed or strongly agreed that SLCs benefited their child's understanding of their academic

achievements. The smallest percentages of parent responses (10.14%) were undecided as to the influence SLCs had on a child's academic achievement and only 13.4% either disagreed or strongly disagreed.

When analyzed across grade levels, the one first grade parent (100%) strongly agreed, 25 (78.1%) fourth grade parents comprised the second highest percentage of respondents that agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. This was followed by 10 (76.9%) third grade parents, and 17 (73.9%) second grade parents. Four second grade parents (17.4%) as well as four fourth grade parents (12.5%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed with statement 5. Two (.09%) second grade parents, two (15.4%) third grade parents, and three (.09%) fourth grade parents were undecided. The majority of parents (76.8%) agreed that SLCs benefit their child's understanding of their academic achievements.

Clearer expectations. Table 10 reflects parent responses to statement 6: Student-led conferencing helps to provide my child with clearer expectations. Thirty-six (52.17%) parent respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, 16 (23.19%) disagreed with this statement, and 17 (24.64%) were undecided.

Table 10

Statement 6 Responses

Response	Grade				Total responses	Total %
	First	Second	Third	Fourth		
5 (strongly agree)	1	4	3	5	13	18.84%
4 (agree)	0	5	5	13	23	33.33%
3 (undecided)	0	6	3	8	17	24.64%
2 (disagree)	0	8	2	6	16	23.19%
1 (strongly disagree)	0	0	0	0	0	0%

When analyzing these results by grade level, over 50% of fourth grade parents either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement (18, 56.2%) compared to eight (61.5%) third grade parents, nine (39.1%) second grade parents, and one (100%) first grade parent. Eight (31%) second grade parents, six (18.8%) fourth grade parents, and two (15.4%) third grade parents disagreed that SLCs provided their child with clearer expectations. Eight (25%) fourth grade parents, three (23%) third grade parents, and six (26%) second grade parents were undecided. The majority of parents (52.1%) perceived SLCs as a tool that provided their child with clearer expectations.

Greater self-pride. Table 11 reflects parent responses to statement 7: Student-led conferencing helps my child gain greater self-pride in their work.

Table 11

Statement 7 Responses

Response	Grade				Total responses	Total %
	First	Second	Third	Fourth		
5 (strongly agree)	0	6	4	17	27	39.13%
4 (agree)	1	14	6	10	31	44.93%
3 (undecided)	0	0	2	1	3	4.35%
2 (disagree)	0	2	1	4	7	10.14%
1 (strongly disagree)	0	1	0	0	1	1.45%

Statement 7 was the highest rated statement in the quantitative survey, with 58 (84%) of all parents either agreeing or strongly agreeing that SLCs helped their child gain greater self-pride in their work. Eight (11.59%) parents either disagreed or strongly disagreed and only three (4.35%) were undecided.

An analysis of parent responses by grade level revealed that one (100%) first grade parent, 20(87%) second grade parents, 10 (76.9%) third grade parents, and 27 (84.4%) fourth grade parents agreed or strongly agreed that SLCs promoted greater self-pride in students' work. A greater number and percentage of fourth grade parents (4, 12.5%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed when compared to second grade parents (3, 13%) and third grade parents (1, 7.7%). Two (25.4%) third grade parents and one (3.1%) fourth grade parent were undecided.

Honesty. Table 12 reflects parent responses to statement 8: Student-led conferencing encourages honesty in my child when reporting academic results to me.

Table 12

Statement 8 Responses

Response	Grade				Total responses	Total %
	First	Second	Third	Fourth		
5 (strongly agree)	0	4	2	5	11	15.94%
4 (agree)	0	7	6	13	26	37.68%
3 (undecided)	1	4	4	8	17	24.64%
2 (disagree)	0	7	1	6	14	20.29%
1 (strongly disagree)	0	1	0	0	1	1.45%

According to the data analysis, 53.6% of responding parents either agreed or strongly agreed that SLCs encourage honesty in their child when reporting academic results to them. Approximately 24.6% were undecided and 21.7% of respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed.

An analysis of parent responses by grade level revealed that 11 (47.8%) second grade parents, eight (61.5%) third grade parents, and 18 (56.2%) fourth grade parents agreed or strongly agreed that SLCs encourage honesty in their child when reporting academic results to them. Eight (34.8%) second grade parents, six (18.8%) fourth grade parents, and one (7.7%) third grade parent disagreed or strongly disagreed with statement 8. Out of the 17 undecided respondents, one (100%) was a first grade parent, four (17.4%) were second

grade parents, four (30.8%) were third grade parents, and eight (25%) were fourth grade parents. The majority of parents agreed that SLCs encourage honesty in their child when reporting grades to them.

Organizational skills. Table 13 reflects parent responses to statement 9: My child's organizational skills have increased as a result of SLCs. Statement 9 had the lowest percentage (20.3%) of parents in agreement or strong agreement when compared with the other 11 statements. The majority of the parents responding to statement 9, (29, 42%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement, and 26 (37.68%) were undecided.

Table 13

Statement 9 Responses

Response	Grade				Total responses	Total %
	First	Second	Third	Fourth		
5 (strongly agree)	0	1	0	1	2	2.90%
4 (agree)	0	3	4	5	12	17.39%
3 (undecided)	1	5	5	15	26	37.68%
2 (disagree)	0	13	4	8	25	36.23%
1 (strongly disagree)	0	1	0	3	4	5.80%

An analysis of results by grade level revealed that only two second grade parents (8.7%), four third grade parents (30.8%) and six fourth grade parents (18.8%) agreed that SLCs have a positive influence on a child's organizational skills. Fourteen (60.7%) of the second grade parents either disagreed or strongly disagreed while four (30.8%) third grade parents and eleven (34.4%) fourth

grade parents either disagreed or strongly disagreed. The majority of fourth grade parents (46.9%) were undecided, as were five (7.7%) third grade parents, five (21.7%) second grade parents, and one (100%) first grade parent. The majority of participants did not feel SLCs resulted in an increase in organizational skills.

Motivation. Table 14 reflects parent responses to statement 10: My child displays more motivation as a result of SLCs.

Table 14

Statement 10 Responses

Response	Grade				Total responses	Total %
	First	Second	Third	Fourth		
5 (strongly agree)	1	3	0	1	5	7.25%
4 (agree)	0	4	5	12	21	30.43%
3 (undecided)	0	4	5	10	19	27.54%
2 (disagree)	0	9	3	9	21	30.43%
1 (strongly disagree)	0	3	0	0	3	4.35%

The number and percentage of parents who agreed or strongly agreed that motivation is a benefit of student-led conferencing (26, 37.7%) is about equal to those parents who disagreed or strongly disagreed (24, 34.8%). Nineteen (27.54%) respondents were undecided.

When analyzing these results by grade level, 13 (40.6%) fourth grade parents either agreed or strongly agreed that motivation was a benefit of SLCs, compared to five (38.5%) third grade parents, seven (30.4%) second grade

parents, and one (100%) first grade parent. Nine (28.1%) fourth grade parents, three (23%) third grade parents, and 12 (52.2%) second grade parents disagreed that their child displayed more motivation as a result of SLCs. Ten (31.3%) fourth grade parents, five (38.5%) third grade parents, and four (17.4%) second grade parents were undecided. Although the number of parents who agreed that motivation is a benefit of SLCs was close to the number that disagreed, the majority of parents agreed with statement 10.

Leadership skills. Table 15 reflects parent responses to statement 11: I see an improvement in my child's leadership skills as a result of student-led conferencing.

Table 15

Statement 11 Responses

Response	Grade				Total responses	Total %
	First	Second	Third	Fourth		
5 (strongly agree)	0	2	5	2	9	13.04%
4 (agree)	1	2	4	5	12	17.39%
3 (undecided)	0	9	4	15	28	40.58%
2 (disagree)	0	9	0	9	18	26.09%
1 (strongly disagree)	0	1	0	0	2	2.90%

Twenty-eight (40.58%) of respondents were undecided as to whether their child's leadership skills improved as a result of SLCs. Twenty-one parents (30.4%) agreed or strongly agreed that their child's leadership skills improved and 20 (29%) disagreed or strongly disagreed.

An analysis of parent responses by grade level revealed that one (100%) first grade parent, four (17.4%) second grade parents, nine (69.2%) third grade parents, and seven (21.%) fourth grade parents agreed or strongly agreed that their child's leadership improved as a result of SLCs. A greater percentage of second grade parents (10, 43.5%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed as compared to fourth grade parents (10, 31.3%) and there were no third grade parents or first grade parents in disagreement. Nine (39.1%) second grade parents, four (30.8%) third grade parents, and 15 (46.9%) fourth grade parents were undecided. Although twenty-one parents agreed that their child's leadership skills increased as a result of student-led conferences the majority of parents were undecided.

Areas of academic progress and areas of needed improvement. Table 16 reflects parent responses to statement 12: SLCs help me to become more aware of my child's academic progress and areas in which my child needs to improve.

According to the results, most parents either agreed or strongly agreed (44, 63.77%) that SLCs helped them to become more aware of their child's academic progress and areas in which they need to improve. The smallest percentage of parents were undecided (9, 13%) and 16 (23.2%) disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Table 16

Statement 12 Responses

Response	Grade				Total responses	Total %
	First	Second	Third	Fourth		
5 (strongly agree)	1	5	2	10	18	26.09%
4 (agree)	0	9	7	10	26	37.68%
3 (undecided)	0	1	2	6	9	13.04%
2 (disagree)	0	8	1	5	14	20.29%
1 (strongly disagree)	0	0	1	1	2	2.90%

Grade level results indicated that 20 (66.7%) fourth grade parents, nine (69.2%) third grade parents, 14 (60.9%) second grade parents and one (100%) first grade parent agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. Six (18.58%) fourth grade parents were undecided, and six (18.58%) fourth grade parents disagreed or strongly disagreed. Two (15.4%) third grade parents were undecided, and two (15.4%) third grade parents disagreed or strongly disagreed. One (4.3%) second grade parent was undecided and eight (3.5%) second grade parents disagreed.

Overall ranking of perceived benefits. The overall ranking from greatest to least perceived benefit of SLCs by elementary parents of students in current grades 1-4 at OCS are represented in Table 17. The majority of parent responses from the quantitative survey indicated that parents agreed or strongly agreed with 9 of the 12 statements. Parents ranked students having greater self-pride as a result of SLCs as the number one benefit. Student-led conferencing

helping students understand their academic achievements was ranked second, and SLCs helping children understand the importance of self-evaluation was ranked third. Benefits that were perceived to be less important and that garnered less than 50% agreement were: SLCs help a child display more motivation (ranked tenth), SLCs improve a child's leadership skills (ranked eleventh), and SLCs help increase a child's organizational skills (ranked twelfth).

Table 17

Perceived Benefits of SLCs

Benefit	Percentage in agreement
1. Greater self-pride in their work	84.06%
2. Helps child understand their academic achievements	76.81%
3. Helps child understand the importance of self-evaluation	71.01%
4. Helps parent become more aware of my child's academic progress and areas in which my child needs to improve	63.77%
5. Helps child understand the importance of good work habits	60.87%
6. Greater communication with child in regards to school work	56.52%
7. Encourages parent attendance	55.07%
8. Honesty in my child when reporting academic results to me	53.62%
9. Helps to provide my child with clearer expectations	52.17%
10. Helps child displays more motivation	37.68%
11. Helps to improve child's leadership skills	30.43%
12. Helps to increase child's organizational skills	20.29%

Research Question 2 Findings

The second part of data collection occurred using a parent questionnaire containing six open-ended questions. These questions were used to gather parent perceptions in an effort to address Research Questions 2 and 3. Please refer to Table 4 for a summary of the distribution and return data for the questionnaire respondents. A total of 198 parents at OCS were invited to respond to the questionnaire: sixty nine parents responded to the questionnaire. The total number of responses may be greater than the total number of respondents because each respondent was not limited to one response.

Research Question 2 asked: What are the perceptions of current Ontario Christian School first-fourth grade parents who have participated in student-led conferences prior to the current 2010-11 academic year, as to how, if at all, student-led conferences have influenced communication between parents and students regarding school, parental expectations, and parenting style? Data addressing Research Question 2 were gathered using questionnaire questions 2, 3, and 4, which were presented as follows:

2. How, if at all, have student-led conferences influenced your parental expectations?
3. How, if at all, have student-led conferences influenced your parenting style when dealing with issues related to your child's academic performance?
4. How, if at all, have student-led conferences influenced communication about school between you and your child?

There were 75 responses to question 2, 75 responses to question 3 and 71 responses to question 4. Responses to questions 2, 3, and 4 were received from one first grade parent, 23 second grade parents, 13 third grade parents and 32 fourth grade parents. The number of grade level responses may be greater than the number of grade level respondents because respondents were not limited to one response.

Response to question 2. Questionnaire question 2 asked: How, if at all, have SLCs influenced your parental expectations? Tables 18 and 19 present the data and findings for this question.

Table 18

Summary of Question 2 Responses by Whole Group

	Influenced Expectations	Did Not Influence Expectations	Undecided	Total
Grade 1-4 Parent Respondents	25	34	10	69
Grade 1-4 Parent Responses	31	34	10	75

Table 19

Summary of Question 2 Responses by Grade Level

	Influenced Expectations	Did Not Influence Expectations	Undecided	Total
Grade 1 Parent Respondents	1	0	0	1
Grade 1 Parent Responses	1	0	0	1
Grade 2 Parent Respondents	7	14	2	23
Grade 2 Parent Responses	10	14	2	26
Grade 3 Parent Respondents	5	3	5	13
Grade 3 Parent Responses	5	3	5	13
Grade 4 Parent Respondents	12	17	3	32
Grade 4 Parent Responses	15	17	3	35

Parent responses to question 2 were categorized into five themes, listed in Table 20.

Table 20

Question 2 Themes

Theme	Overall Response Frequency	Grade Level			
		First	Second	Third	Fourth
Increased Leadership	2	0	2	0	0
Clarifies Expectations	13	1	4	4	4
Reinforces Expectations	4	0	1	0	3
Increased Expectations	11	0	3	0	8
Decreased Expectations	1	0	0	1	0

A number of responses indicated that parental expectations had increased or were clarified in various ways as a result of SLCs. Some of the reasons parents offered to explain this phenomenon included:

- I am more aware of what is being asked of from my child academically so I expect more,
- Since my child is held more accountable I expect more,
- I expect more motivation from my child and more awareness of the skills he has learned,
- Since I know what is being taught and how my child completes the tasks I expect more from others,

- I expect more because my child's performance is clarified,
- As a result of student-led conferencing I am able to see improvements and know what to look for,
- Since I am able to participate and see what my child is capable of, I expect more in class,
- Since I am on one accord with my child in regards to the lessons taught my expectations have increased, and
- Although academic expectations have not increased I expect to see more in leadership skills."

Parents' responses to this question indicated that they felt SLCs helped them clarify the importance of communication, encouraged them to be better listeners, encouraged their child to practice and be organized, and explained what their children understand so parents know what to expect from them in terms of academic performance. Four parents stated that SLCs have reinforced their expectations because they can see how their children perform at school and as a result they know when and how to encourage them. One parent reported that his/her expectations have decreased as a result of seeing their children struggle during their SLCs; seeing how terrible children feel about not accomplishing their goals makes parents not expect too much because they know the children is doing their best. Thirty-seven parents (49.33%) did not feel SLCs had influenced their parental expectations at all and three out of these 37 (4%) stated that they wanted more teacher time. The remaining 34 of these 37 stated that SLCs had no influence on their parental expectations. Ten (13.33%)

of the 75 parents were undecided as to whether SLCs had influenced their parental expectations.

Results indicate that although SLCs might influence some parents, SLCs did not appear to have any influence on the expectations of over 50% of the parents at OCS. For those parents who indicated that SLCs have influenced their expectations, it appears that SLCs served mainly to clarify and reinforce expectations as opposed to actually increasing expectations. The number of conferences attended by the parents did not have any notable effect on their responses to question 2.

Response to question 3. Questionnaire question 3 asked: How, if at all, have SLCs influenced your parenting style when dealing with issues related to your child's academic performance? Seventy-five responses were received. Tables 21 and 22 present the data and findings for this question. Parent responses to question #3 were categorized into four themes, listed in Table 23.

Table 21

Summary of Question 3 Responses by Whole Group

	Influenced Expectations	Did Not Influence Expectations	Undecided	Total
Grade 1-4 Parent Respondents	21	33	15	69
Grade 1-4 Parent Responses	27	33	15	75

Table 22

Summary of Question 3 Responses by Grade Level

	Influenced Expectations	Did Not Influence Expectations	Undecided	Total
Grade 1 Parent Respondents	1	0	0	1
Grade 1 Parent Responses	3	0	0	3
Grade 2 Parent Respondents	8	12	3	23
Grade 2 Parent Responses	8	12	3	23
Grade 3 Parent Respondents	4	5	4	13
Grade 3 Parent Responses	5	5	4	14
Grade 4 Parent Respondents	8	16	8	32
Grade 4 Parent Responses	11	16	8	35

Table 23

Question 3 Themes

Theme	Overall Response Frequency	Grade Level			
		First	Second	Third	Fourth
Opens Communication	10	0	4	0	10
Academic Assistance	14	3	4	4	3
More Responsibility	1	0	0	0	1
Patience	2	0	0	1	1

A total of 75 parent responses were given to this question. Fourteen (18.6%) parents indicated that they perceive SLCs influence their parenting style because it helps them to provide their child with more academic assistance. These parents felt that SLCs allow them to witness their children's frustrations and weaknesses, understand their children's perspectives regarding the help

they need, adapt their home approaches to the way things are taught in school, and remind them that children need their parents' help and support. Ten (13.3%) parents felt that SLCs influence their parental style because it opens the lines of communication between them and their children. Parents stated that they take more time to listen to their children about schoolwork, display more patience with their children, and are not as hard on their children when they don't understand since they thoroughly understand their children's areas of concern. Five parents stated that the student-led conference process allows them to identify whether their child's problems are real or if they are just not applying themselves, enabling support to be given when needed. Another parent stated that student-led conferencing helps parents to have more confidence in the education their child is receiving, which allows them to place more responsibility on their child. Two others noted that they would like more teacher time. Out of the remaining parent responses, 15 (20%) were undecided and 33 (44%) did not see SLCs as influencing their parenting style in any way. Although the majority of parents (64%) did not feel SLCs influenced their parenting style it is apparent that SLCs influence parents' providing academic assistance to students in addition to opening the communication between home, school, and student. As with the first parent response question there was no correlation between responses and the number of conferences the parent had attended.

All of the first grade responses (3, 100%) viewed the SLC process as providing parents with an opportunity to witness their child's weakness while encouraging them to provide more assistance for their child. Four (17.4%) out of

23 second grade parents stated they now provide more assistance for their child, as did four (28.5%) of the third grade parents and three (8.8%) of the fourth grade parents. Two second grade respondents and three fourth grade respondents reported that the SLC process helps them detect whether their child's problems are academic problems that need to be addressed by the parent, however no third grade parents provided this response. One second grade parent and one fourth grade parent stated that SLCs cause them to have greater admiration for the school system because they allow the parents to see their child perform.

Response to question 4. Question 4 asked: How, if at all, have SLCs influenced communication about school between you and your child? Tables 24 and 25 present the data and findings for this question. Parent responses to question 4 were categorized into three themes, identified in Table 26.

Table 24

Summary of Question 4 Responses by Whole Group

	Influenced Expectations	Did Not Influence Expectations	Undecided	Total
Grade 1-4 Parent Respondents	19	27	23	69
Grade 1-4 Parent Responses	21	27	23	71

Table 25

Summary of Question 4 Responses by Grade Level

	Influenced Expectations	Did Not Influence Expectations	Undecided	Total
Grade 1 Parent Respondents	1	0	0	1
Grade 1 Parent Responses	1	0	0	1
Grade 2 Parent Respondents	6	10	7	23
Grade 2 Parent Responses	8	10	7	25
Grade 3 Parent Respondents	3	5	5	13
Grade 3 Parent Responses	3	5	5	13
Grade 4 Parent Respondents	9	12	11	32
Grade 4 Parent Responses	9	12	11	32

Table 26

Question 4 Themes

Theme	Overall Response Frequency	Grade Level			
		First	Second	Third	Fourth
Cultivates Academic Discussion	11	1	3	2	5
Increases Excitement	9	0	4	1	4
Decrease in Communication	1	0	1	0	0

A total of 71 parent responses were given to this question. Twenty-seven out of 71 (38%) parent responses showed that parents perceived SLCs as having no influence on communication, and 23 out of 71 (32.4%) responses were undecided. Eleven parents (15.4%) felt that SLCs provide the opportunity for communication, which brings clarity in understanding the academics at school. In addition, these parents felt SLCs allowed them to ask students questions

about their work, which in turn uncovers neglected areas so the parent can provide assistance. The analysis also revealed that nine parents (12.7%) felt that communication had opened between them and their child as a result of SLCs. Respondents stated that the students were happy to have an opportunity to work with their parents and have their undivided attention. One parent stated, “they are eager to share their successes.” Respondents also offered the following feedback about the impact SLCs had on communication:

- We see very little difference in communication,
- There is less communication with the teacher and that is not good, and
- We can discuss what I’ve seen and how he compares to other students in the class.

Some parents indicated that SLCs enable them to see how their child compares to others. Another parent claimed that SLCs lead to less teacher time, which the parent viewed as not being a positive change. More than 60% of respondents either did not perceive SLCs as influencing their communication with their child or were undecided as to how SLCs have influenced their communication. No correlation was found between the responses given and the number of conferences the parent had attended.

When comparing data across grade levels, analysis revealed that the one (100%) first grade response stated that SLCs influence a parent’s communication about school because they provide a clearer understanding about schoolwork through the academic discussions that take place. Four (16%) of the 25 second grade respondents felt that SLCs created a clearer understanding about

schoolwork through discussion, as did two (15.4%) of the 13 third grade respondents and four (12.5%) of the 32 fourth grade respondents. Four (16%) second grade responses, three (9.4%) fourth grade responses, and one (7.7%) third grade response indicated that SLCs influence communication because children are excited to share their work with their parent. One fourth grade parent out of 32 (9.4%) enjoyed seeing how her/his child compares to the other students in the class. The remaining responses (7 out of 25, 28%, in second grade; 5 out of 13, 38.5%, in third grade, and 11 out of 32, 34.3%, in fourth grade) were undecided. Ten out of 25 (40%) of second grade responses compared to 12 out of 32 (37.5%) fourth grade responses and 5 out of 13 (38.5%) third grade responses noted no influence on communication.

Research Question 3 Findings

The last research question in this study, Research Question 3 asked: What are the perceptions of current OCS first-fourth grade parents who have participated in SLCs prior to the current 2010-2011 academic year, as to how, if at all, SLCs have influenced student academic performance in content areas, student motivation, student success orientation, and achievement? Sixty-nine parents responded to the questionnaire; responses for questionnaire questions 1, 5 and 6 were used to collect data to answer research question 3. As previously noted, the number of responses may be greater than the number of respondents because parents were not limited to one response. Parent response questions 1, 5 and 6 are as follows:

1. How, if at all, have student-led conferences influenced your child's achievement and performance?
5. How, if at all, have student-led conferences influenced student motivation at school?
6. How, if at all, have student-led conferences influenced your child's accountability, in regards to their academic outcomes at school?

In order to analyze the parent responses related to Research Question 3 tables were created for responses to questions 1, 5 and 6. Responses were organized in order to accurately group like responses. Responses were labeled according to the grade level of parent's child and the number of conferences the parent attended. If a parents' response to a question was the same as one previously stated a tally was added to first parent's response. In the following sections, the number next to a response represents the number of parents that gave that response. The findings were as follows.

Response to question 1. Question 1 asked: How if at all, have SLCs influenced your child's achievement and performance? Tables 27 and 28 present the data and findings for this question.

Table 27

Summary of Question 1 Responses by Whole Group

	Influenced Expectations	Did Not Influence Expectations	Undecided	Total
Grade 1-4 Parent Respondents	36	18	15	69
Grade 1-4 Parent Responses	42	18	15	75

Table 28

Summary of Question 1 Responses by Grade Level

	Influenced Expectations	Did Not Influence Expectations	Undecided	Total
Grade 1 Parent Respondents	1	0	0	1
Grade 1 Parent Responses	4	0	0	4
Grade 2 Parent Respondents	8	11	4	23
Grade 2 Parent Responses	11	11	4	26
Grade 3 Parent Respondents	5	5	3	13
Grade 3 Parent Responses	5	5	3	13
Grade 4 Parent Respondents	22	2	8	32
Grade 4 Parent Responses	22	2	8	32

Parent responses to question 1 were categorized into three themes, listed in Table 29.

Table 29

Question 1 Themes

Theme	Overall Response Frequency	Grade Level			
		First	Second	Third	Fourth
Academic Clarity	8	3	2	1	2
Proud/Academic Presentations	31	1	7	3	20
Increased Confidence	3	0	2	1	0

Eighteen (24%) of the 75 responses received for question 1 indicated that SLCs had no influence on a child's achievement and performance. Fifteen parents (20%) were undecided about to the influence of SLCs on student achievement and performance, while eight parents (10.6%) felt SLCs helped

students develop a clear understanding of what they needed to do, which assisted them in their achievement and performance. The most responses were found in the category of student pride. Thirty-one (41.3%) of the parents felt their child was proud to have an opportunity to demonstrate his/her work for his/her parents, which caused them to work harder and improved their achievement and performance. Eight parents (10.7%) noted that SLCs provide academic clarity for students as well as their parents. Three parents (4%) noted an increase in confidence and leadership skills as a result of SLCs and felt that this confidence helped to increase their child's academic standing. There was no correlation between the number of conferences attended and the responses to question 1. The majority of responses indicated that parents do believe SLCs influence their child's achievement and performance; the largest percentage of responses were related to the child's pride in demonstrating tasks and working harder to become proficient as a result.

When analyzed across grade it was found that the majority of fourth grade respondents (20 out of 32, 62.5%) thought that children being proud to demonstrate their work greatly influenced their achievement and performance. Three out of 23 (23%) of third grade responses and seven out of 26 (27%) of second grade responses shared the same opinion. The greatest percentage of second grade responses (11 out of 26, 42.3%) indicated that SLCs had no influence on achievement and performance; five out of 13 (38.5%) third grade parents and two out of 32 (6.3%) fourth grade parents shared the same sentiment. Three out of four (75%) first grade parents stated that SLCs led to

student improvement due to a clearer understanding for students in addition to the parents as to what needed to be accomplished, as did two out of 26 (7.7%) second grade parents, one out of 13 (7.7%) third grade parents, and two out of 32 (6.3%) fourth grade parents. Some parents also stated that SLCs provided them with a clear overview of assignments, which they felt had an influence on student achievement and performance. This sentiment was endorsed by one out of four (25%) first grade parents and one out of 32 (3.1%) fourth grade parents. Two (7.7%) second grade parents and one (7.7%) third grade parent saw an increase in confidence, which had an influence on achievement and performance. The following respondents indicated that SLCs had no influence on student achievement and performance: second grade parents (11 out of 26, 42.3%) 5 out of 13 (38.5%) third grade parents, and two out of 32 (6.3%) fourth grade parents.

Response to question 5. Question 5 asked: How if at all, have SLCs influenced your child's motivation at school? Tables 30 and 31 present the data and findings for this question.

Table 30

Summary of Question 5 Responses by Whole Group

	Influenced Expectations	Did Not Influence Expectations	Undecided	Total
Grades 1-4 Parent Respondents	22	28	19	69
Grades 1-4 Parent Responses	28	28	19	74

Table 31

Summary of Question 5 Responses by Grade Level

	Influenced Expectations	Did Not Influence Expectations	Undecided	Total
Grade 1 Parent Respondents	1	0	0	1
Grade 1 Parent Responses	2	0	0	2
Grade 2 Parent Respondents	6	13	4	23
Grade 2 Parent Responses	8	13	4	25
Grade 3 Parent Respondents	2	6	5	13
Grade 3 Parent Responses	2	6	5	13
Grade 4 Parent Respondents	13	9	10	32
Grade 4 Parent Responses	15	9	10	34

Parent responses to question 5 were categorized into five themes, identified in Table 32.

Table 32

Question 5 Themes

Theme	Overall Response Frequency	Grade Level			
		First	Second	Third	Fourth
Parental Awareness	5	2	0	0	3
Increased Leadership	3	0	1	1	1
Clearer Expectations	3	0	0	1	2
Excitement	16	1	7	0	8
Slight Uncategorized Influence	1	0	0	0	1

The researcher received 74 responses to question 5. Out of the 74 responses, 16 parents (21.6%) stated that their child was excited to show his/her

work to his/her parents and this excitement transferred into motivation. Five parents (6.8%) thought their child was more motivated because the parent could see what he/she was doing and help motivate him/her in the areas where needed. Another three (4%) responses indicated children built leadership skills as a result of SLCs, and being a leader motivated them academically. Two parents (2.7%) saw SLCs as benefiting their child's motivation because the conference gave the students an opportunity to clarify their expectations. One parent (1.4%) only saw a slight increase in motivation while 19 (25.7%) were undecided and 28 (37.8%) did not believe that SLCs influenced a student's motivation at school. The results did not indicate a correlation between the responses and the number of conferences attended. Twenty-eight parents indicated that SLCs did not influence motivation and 19 parent responses were undecided. However, 27 out of 74 (36.5%) respondents – more than 1/3 of the overall responses – indicated that parents perceive SLCs as influencing a child's motivation in school.

An analysis of grade level responses provided the following results. In first grade, two out of three responses (66.6%) indicated parental awareness and immediate praise as having an influence on child motivation. One out of three responses (33.3%) indicated that a child's excitement to participate in the SLC as had an influence on motivation. In the second grade, seven out of 25 respondents (28%) felt that student excitement about the opportunity to showcase work had a direct influence on student motivation, four out of 25 (16%) were undecided, and one out of 25 (4%) saw the opportunity for leadership as

influencing motivation. The majority of second grade responses (13 out of 25, 52%) did not feel SLCs influenced student motivation. Among parents of third graders, six out of 13 (46.1%) respondents saw no influence in student motivation as a result of SLCs, five out of 13 (38.5%) were undecided, one out of 13 (7.7%) cited a child's excitement to lead as an influence on motivation, and one out of 13 (7.7%) stated that SLCs provide an opportunity for students to see what is expected, which in turn motivates them. Eight of the 33 fourth grade responses (24.2%) perceived excitement to present to the parents as an influence on motivation and another ten (30.3%) were undecided. Nine out of 33 fourth grade responses (27.2%) indicated that SLCs have no influence on motivation, two (6%) parents felt that knowing what to expect academically influenced student influence on motivation, and one fourth grade parent felt that the leadership gained during SLCs influenced student motivation. Most parents who noted an influence on motivation saw increased excitement as the main benefit of SLCs that led to increased motivation.

Response to question 6. Question 6 asked: How if at all, have SLCs influenced your child's accountability in regards to their academic outcomes at school? Tables 33 and 34 present the data and findings for this question.

Table 33

Summary of Question 6 Responses by Whole Group

	Influenced Expectations	Did Not Influence Expectations	Undecided	Total
Grades 1-4 Parent Respondents	17	25	27	69
Grades 1-4 Parent Responses	22	25	27	74

Table 34

Summary of Question 6 Responses by Grade Level

	Influenced Expectations	Did Not Influence Expectations	Undecided	Total
Grade 1 Parent Respondents	1	0	0	1
Grade 1 Parent Responses	2	0	0	2
Grade 2 Parent Respondents	7	9	7	23
Grade 2 Parent Responses	9	9	7	25
Grade 3 Parent Respondents	2	3	8	13
Grade 3 Parent Responses	2	5	8	15
Grade 4 Parent Respondents	9	11	12	32
Grade 4 Parent Responses	9	11	12	32

Parent responses to question 6 were categorized into five themes, identified in Table 35.

Table 35

Question 6 Themes

Theme	Overall Response Frequency	Grade Level			
		First	Second	Third	Fourth
Motivation	9	1	7	1	0
Parental Involvement	9	1	2	1	5
Clarifies Understanding	1	0	0	0	1
Self-Pride	2	0	0	0	2
Increases Accountability/No identified reason	1	0	0	0	1

A total of 74 responses were given for question 6. Nine (12.2%) of the responses stated that a child's accountability increases with student-led

conferencing because students have to complete and share work with the parent at the conference. Nine (12.2%) of the responses stated that SLCs have an influence on student accountability because they make their child want to try harder. One parent (1.4%) felt that student-led conferencing provided students with a clearer academic understanding. Two (2.7%) of the respondents indicated that pride gained as a result of participating in SLCs has a positive influence on student accountability. One fourth grade parent did perceive SLCs as beneficial but did not provide a reason. The number of conferences a parent attended did not have any correlation with the results. Over half of the responses (68.9%) indicated that parents perceived SLCs as having no influence on a child's accountability, indecision as to the effect they have. The remaining 31.1% did perceive SLCs as having an influence on a child's accountability.

An analysis of results by grade level revealed that only one out of two (50%) first grade parent responses, two out of 25 (8%) second grade parent responses, and five out of 32 (15.6%) fourth grade parent responses perceived SLCs as having an influence on a child's accountability through parent involvement. Two of the 32 fourth grade responses perceived a child's pride and desire to achieve as an influence on a child's accountability. Seven out of 25 (28%) second grade responses along with one out of 15 (6.7%) third grade responses and one (50%) first grade response indicated that students were more motivated as a result of SLCs, which in turn increases a child's accountability in regards to academic outcomes at school. In the fourth grade one out of 32 (3.1%) responses cited a child's clearer understanding of academic requirements

as an influence on his/her accountability. The remaining respondents – four out of 15 third grade parents, 2.6%, and 12 out of 32 (37.5%) fourth grade parents – were undecided as to the influence SLCs have on a child's accountability. Nine out of 25 (36%) second grade parents, four out of 15 (2.6%) third grade parents, and 11 out of 32 (34.3%) fourth grade parents reported that they did not perceive SLCs as having any influence on a child's accountability regarding his/her academic outcomes.

Summary of Findings

A total of 198 parent surveys and questionnaire packets were distributed at OCS and a total of 69 (38.4%) completed packets were returned. The survey included 12 benefit statements regarding SLCs; parents were asked to rate each of these benefits using a 5-point Likert Scale, where 5 indicated strong agreement, 4 indicated agreement, 3 indicated undecided, 2 indicate disagreement, and 1 indicated strong disagreement.

An analysis of the survey data revealed two key findings for research question one regarding the perceived benefits of student-led conferencing at OCS. The first key finding was that the majority of parent participants (55.1%) in the study found SLCs to be beneficial in one or more areas. The second key finding was that of the 12 benefits rated by parents at OCS, 58 parents (84.06%) ranked students having greater self-pride as a result of SLCs as the number #1 benefit. Other benefits that ranked among the top three included: student-led conferencing helps students understand their academic achievements, ranked #2 by 53 parents (76.81%); and students being able to understand the importance of

self-evaluation, ranked #3 with by 49 parents (71.10%). The three benefits that ranked as the least important were: helps to provide my child with more motivation, ranked #10 by 26 parents (37.68%); helps to improve child's leadership skills, ranked #11 by 21 parents (30.43%); and helps to increase a child's organizational skills, ranked as least beneficial by 14 parents (20.29%).

The qualitative portion of data collection was used to answer research questions 2 and 3 and consisted of a questionnaire with six semi-structured questions. The questionnaire solicited the parent's perceptions as to how, if at all, SLCs have influenced communication between parents and students regarding school, parental expectations, and parenting style (research question two). In addition the qualitative portion was used to determine parent's perceptions as to how, if at all, SLCs have influenced academic performance in content areas, student motivation, and student success orientation, and achievement (research question 3). Sixty-nine parents responded to the questionnaire with a total of a total of 71-75 responses per question.

Of the 75 responses received, 26 (35%) deemed SLCs as having a positive influence on parental expectations. Of the 75 responses given, 27 (36%) cited SLCs as having a positive influence on parenting style. Of the 71 responses given, 20 (28%) referenced SLCs as having a positive influence on parent-child communication about school. The area of academic achievement and performance received the greatest percentage of positive responses. Of the 75 responses received, 42 (56%) referenced SLCs as having a positive influence on a child's achievement and performance. Motivation received 36.5% (27) positive

parent responses as to the influence SLCs have on motivation. Of the 74 responses given by parents, 22 of those responses (30%) attribute SLCs as having a positive influence on a child's accountability in regards to their academic outcomes at school.

Although parents reported several reasons why they perceive SLCs have a positive influence at OCS, three key findings resulted from an analysis of the questionnaire data. The first key finding was related research question 2 and the communication that takes place between parents and students regarding school, parental expectations, and parenting style. This key finding also related to research question 3 because it addresses student academic performance in content areas as well as a student's overall academic achievement. According to parent respondents, SLCs reinforces parental awareness through academic discussions that were held during SLCs. These academic discussions helped provide clearer expectations for the parents as well as the students. Since parents were able to witness their child accomplishing academic tasks, the parents felt that they had clearer expectations. They were then also more aware of their child's academic needs, which in turn helped determine their parenting style. Parents enjoyed seeing their children succeed and if there was clarification as to the areas in which their child needed help, they would alter their parenting style in order to provide assistance as needed.

The second key finding, related to research question 3, addresses how, if at all, SLCs influence a child's academic performance, motivation, success orientation, and achievement. The findings revealed parents' perceptions that a

child's excitement and motivation which is enhanced through the process of SLCs appeared to be almost the same thing, producing the same results when it comes to influencing a child's academic performance, achievement, and student accountability. Parents reported that the process of SLCs excites children because they enjoy taking on a leadership role by guiding parents through the process of SLCs. Because of the children's excitement, they are also motivated to focus on the lessons being taught to assure themselves that they will be able to perform the required academic tasks for their parents during the conference. Parents communicated that because the students are more focused, they are able to identify when they do not understand what is being taught and ask questions for clarification. As a result of their efforts, many students perform better and achieve greater academic success.

The third key finding was also related to research question 3. The pride that children gain as a result of SLCs appears to be a key element influencing student academic performance, motivation, and achievement. Parent responses indicated that pride builds confidence and leadership skills, which has a positive effect on a child's academic outcomes at school. Parents shared that through the process of SLCs, children have the opportunity to showcase what they have learned for their parents. Because they have worked hard to reach their goals, they are proud to share the results with their parents. In addition, parents communicated that SLCs call for the student to take a leadership role, guiding his/her parents through the conference. Since the child has worked hard to attain his/her goals in order to fulfill the tasks, he/she becomes more aware of

what needs to be done and have more pride in his/her accomplishments. In addition, parents shared that as a result of their self-pride, their children have more confidence, which encourages them to be leaders of the conferencing process. Parents shared that when a child is more confident in his/her academic capabilities this confidence is transferred to academics and becomes evident in academic outcomes.

Overall, the qualitative open-ended response questions produced a total of 444 parent responses (71-75 responses per question); of the 444 responses, less than 1% viewed SLCs as having a negative influence on parental expectations, parenting style when dealing with issues related to a child's academic performance, communication about school between a parent and his/her child, achievement and performance, student motivation, and student accountability in regards to their academic outcomes at school. One hundred sixty-three out of 444 (36.7%) parent responses indicated that SLCs had no influence on students; 109 (24.5%) were undecided as to the influence of SLCs. The highest percentage of parent responses (216 parents, 48.6%) found SLCs to be influential in the aforementioned areas. This analysis concluded that there were no significant findings in relation to grade level comparisons. Prior to the final analysis the researcher invited an ELAP colleague and two additional educational experts experienced in the area of qualitative coding and analysis to conduct a separate analysis of questionnaire data so the researcher could compare the findings and eliminate any researcher bias. The individual analysis' results produced the same outcomes.

Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this concurrent multiple methods study was to inform the work at Ontario Christian School (OCS) related to elementary student-led conferences (SLCs) in grades kindergarten through third grade during the 2009-2010 school year by exploring OCS elementary parent perceptions regarding the benefits, if any, of SLCs. In addition, the purpose of the study was to explore parent perceptions about how, if at all, SLCs have influenced parent awareness of K-third grade student academic performance in content areas, communication between parents and students in regards to school, parental expectations and parenting style, as well as the influence, if any, student-led conferencing has had on student motivation and accountability.

The following questions guided this study:

1. What do parents of current first-fourth grade elementary students at Ontario Christian School who have participated in student-led conferences prior to the current academic year 2010-11 school year, perceive to be the benefits, if any, of student-led conferences?
2. What are the perceptions of current Ontario Christian School first-fourth grade parents, who have participated in student-led conferences prior to the current 2010-2011 academic year, as to how, if at all, student-led conferences have influenced communication between parents and students regarding school, parental expectations, and parenting style?

3. What are the perceptions of current Ontario Christian School first-fourth grade parents, who have participated in student-led conferences prior to the current 2010-2011 academic year, as to how, if at all, student-led conferences have influenced student academic performance in content areas, student motivation, and student accountability?

This study explored the perceptions of parents of first through fourth grade students at OCS who had participated in SLCs prior to the 2010-2011 academic year, as to the benefits of SLCs through the administration of a quantitative survey in which parents were asked to give a 5-1 Likert rating response to 12 structured statements. Concurrently, the same parents were administered a qualitative questionnaire and invited to respond to six semi-structured questions that explored parent perceptions as to the influence that SLCs have on communication about school, parental expectations, parenting style, student's academic performance, student motivation, and student accountability. The surveys and questionnaires were put together in packets and sent home with students by the classroom teacher, one set per parent. The principal, Mr. Keith Lucas, distributed the packets to teachers. Incentives were provided for students and parents upon the return of completed the surveys/questionnaires. During the research collection period, teachers reminded the students to return the surveys/questionnaires and the principal sent three reminders to the parents through an automated school telephone message center. A total of 198 survey/questionnaire sets were distributed and 69 completed sets were returned.

Discussion of Findings

Research question one. The quantitative survey portion of data collection was used to answer research question one and determine what the parents at OCS perceive to be the benefits, if any, of SLCs. An analysis of the survey data revealed two key findings for research question regarding the perceived benefits of student-led conferencing.

The first key finding was that the majority of parent participants (55.1%) in the study found SLCs to be beneficial in one or more areas. Little and Allan (1989) also note SLCs as being beneficial and state that there are an array of benefits to implementing SLCs that are not as apparent in traditional parent-teacher conferences. This finding was likely evident in the OCS data due to the fact that the parents who attended the SLCs appreciated the academic discussions that took place during the conferences. The students were apparently well prepared to relay academic results to their parents, otherwise the parents would not have felt as though they were appropriately informed. Gismondi (2009) concludes that several elementary teachers also view SLCs as beneficial and do not feel as though parents get all of the information they need via the traditional conferencing format.

The second key finding was that of the 12 benefits rated by parents at OCS, 58 (84.06%) parents ranked students having greater self-pride as a result of SLCs was ranked as the most important benefit. From the results gathered, it appeared as though student self-pride was a contributing factor in many of the benefits resulting from student-led conferencing. Since pride contributed to so

many other areas, parents viewed pride as the most important benefit. Bailey and Guskey (2001), Benson and Barnett (1999), Hubert (1989), and LeBlanc (2000) concur that students gaining self-pride as a result of SLCs is one of the most visible benefits of the process. Parents were noted as saying their child appears to be more responsible as a result of self-pride; students exhibited an overt increase in maturity as a result of gaining more self-pride in addition to helping parents gain more knowledge about the school and the curriculum. When students are proud of themselves and their accomplishments, they express this to their parents and this helps the parents clearly see how the school is performing academically on a day to day basis (Bailey & Guskey, 2001).

Other benefits that ranked among the top three included: student-led conferencing helps students understand their academic achievement, ranked #2 by 53 (76.81%) parents, and students being able to understand the importance of self-evaluation, ranked #3 by 49 (71.10%) parents. Hackman (1996) noted these benefits as needed goals to be considered when implementing SLCs in order to increase student accountability and parental academic awareness. Although the quantitative portion of this study revealed that parents perceive greater self-pride as the most important benefit of SLCs, the additional two benefits rankings in the top three could be viewed as results of greater self-pride, according to parent comments. When students are confident and proud of themselves they are more likely to participate in the self-evaluation process because they are thinking positive and not over consumed by the thoughts of what they might not be able to

do. As a result of their confidence students try harder to understand their accomplishments and this is achieved through academic evaluation. SLCs provide a process that enables students to evaluate themselves while also understanding their accomplishments.

Research questions 2 and 3 The qualitative portion of data collection was used to answer research questions 2 and 3 and consisted of a questionnaire with six semi-structured questions. The questionnaire solicited the parents' perceptions as to how, if at all, SLCs have influenced communication between parents and students regarding school, parental expectations, and parenting style (research question 2). In addition the qualitative portion was used to determine parents' perceptions as to how, if at all, SLCs have influenced academic performance in content areas, student motivation, student success orientation, and student achievement (research question 3). Sixty-nine parents responded to the questionnaire, providing a total of a total of 71-75 responses per question. Although parents revealed several reasons why SLCs are perceived as having a positive influence at OCS, there were three key findings that resulted from an analysis of the questionnaire data.

The first key finding was that academic discussions that occur as a result of SLCs have a tremendous influence on communication between parents and students regarding school, parental expectations, and parenting style. This finding relates to research question 2, in addition to addressing two of the entities in research question 3: student academic performance in content areas and a student's overall academic achievement. Bailey and Guskey (2001) state that

the SLC process requires student to internalize the academics that are covered in class, enabling them to engage in academic discussions with their parents. Krejci (2002) asserts that schools and families must work together to support learning in order for students to succeed. Academic discussions support student learning. SLCs are designed to increase a student's vocabulary because the student has to initiate academic discussions, according to Stiggins (2005). This increase in vocabulary has an effect on a student's academic performance and achievement. According to the parents at OCS, SLCs have a viable influence on the academic setting because they help to reinforce parental awareness through the academic discussions that take place during the SLC process. These academic discussions also provide clearer expectations for parents as well as for students. When students have to engage in conversations about academics with parents and not just quietly complete work they are forced to take on more responsibility for being prepared to discuss their work.

Marzano (2003) describes communication about school (also referred to as academic discussions) as a key student factor that influences student achievement. Since parents were able to witness their child accomplishing academic tasks during SLCs, they felt that they had clearer expectations. They were also more aware of their child's academic needs, which then helped determine their parenting style. Parents enjoyed seeing their children succeed and if there was clarification as to the areas that their child needed help, they would alter their parenting style in order to provide assistance as needed.

The second key finding is related to research question 3, regarding how, if at all, SLCs influence a child's academic performance, motivation, success orientation, and achievement. The findings revealed that the parents at OCS believe a child's excitement and motivation, which they note as being enhanced through the process of SLCs, as almost synonymous to each other when it comes to influencing a child's academic performance, achievement and student accountability. Parents might share this view because students receive more recognition for achieving academically during a SLC than any other means of academic reporting. When a child takes a test, the results are received later and usually on paper, not verbally. Report cards are given at the end of a marking period, once again on paper and not verbally. SLCs give students a chance to get immediate feedback from those who they want to make proud: namely, their parents. As a result of the process students strive to display exceptional academic performance during the conference. Parents reported that the process of SLCs excites children because they enjoy taking on a leadership role by guiding parents through the SLC process. The excitement turns into motivation and according to Stiggins (2005) it is customary for people to perform better when they are motivated. Because children are excited parents believed that they are also motivated to focus on the lessons being taught to assure themselves that they will be able to perform the academic tasks for their parents during the conference. It was determined in a study by Niebuhr and Niebuhr (1999) that students who are motivated will achieve. Terri Austin, a sixth grade teacher in Anchorage, Alaska noted the same finding with her class. Austin

(1994) saw the attitudes in her class quickly change as a result of increased motivation. Parents at OCS communicated that because the students are more focused, they are able to identify when they do not understand what is being taught and ask questions for clarification. As a result of their efforts, many students perform better and achieve greater academic success.

The third key finding was also related to research question 3. The pride that children gain as a result of SLCs appears to be a key element influencing student academic performance, motivation, and achievement. Martin et al. (2003) attribute a student's energy and drive to learn and work as having a direct influence on student achievement. Parent responses indicated that they attributed the pride their child gained as building confidence and increasing their child's leadership skills, which appeared to have a positive effect on their child's academic outcomes at school. Hubert (1989) and Austin (1994) both noted students gaining leadership skills as a result of SLCs. Being able to take on a leadership role is a sign of confidence. In addition, individuals usually only receive a leadership position when someone has confidence in them. SLCs offer students the opportunity to feel as though they are being trusted with an important position: the leader of the conference. When a child gains confidence in one area it usually begins to spread into other areas. Parents at OCS shared that through the process of SLCs, children have the opportunity to showcase what they have learned for their parents. Being entrusted with leadership responsibilities helped the students feel good, and feeling good about themselves in turn has a positive effect on academic achievement and

performance. Because the students have displayed motivation and worked hard to reach their goals, they are proud to share the results with their parents. In addition, parents communicated that since students worked hard to attain their goals in order to fulfill the tasks, they become more aware of what needs to be done and have more pride in their accomplishments. In addition, parents shared that the pride gained gives them the encouragement to be leaders of the conferencing process and this is transferred to their academics and evident in their academic outcomes.

Conclusions

Three general conclusions were drawn from this study. The first conclusion was that SLCs at OCS provide an opportunity for greater communication among students, parents, and teachers that centers on students' learning and achievement. Table 5 showed that the majority of parent respondents (39, 56.52%) reported that they agreed or strongly agreed that SLCs provided greater communication with their child in regards to schoolwork. In her book, *Changing the View*, Terri Austin (1994) states that students, parents, and teachers all have an opportunity for greater communication using the SLC approach. Teachers have the opportunity to have discussions with students regarding their academics prior to the conference and during the conference students have the opportunity to engage their parents in academically centered conversations revolving around student work. Guyton (1989) and Hackman (1996) concur that SLCs encourage students, parents, and teachers to communicate openly. Although teachers do not take an especially active role in

the conference they are available for parents and students if assistance is needed. Lewis (2006), Little and Allan (1989), and Moore (2003) all concur that SLCs provide an opportunity for greater communication.

The second conclusion was that SLCs provide a means for OCS parents to take a more active role in their children's learning process. As a result of participating in SLCs, parents are more likely to understand their children's academic needs, know what to expect from them academically, and know how to support their learning. Quantitative findings revealed that 18.6% of the parents perceived SLCs as helping them to provide academic assistance to their child by providing awareness, 13.3% said SLCs helped them assist their child by opening the lines of communication and 5% noted that SLCs helped them to identify actual areas of need as opposed to their child having difficulties as a result of a lack of effort. In the qualitative findings, parent respondents stated that SLCs reinforced their parental awareness through academic discussions that were held during SLCs. Parents as well as the students had clearer expectations and through the process the parents became more aware of their child's academic needs. According to Hubert (1989) parents leave SLCs knowing exactly where their child is academically, and Bailey and Guskey (2001) note that teachers need to prepare the students prior to the conference so during the conference they can explore ways in which their parents can support them academically.

The third and final conclusion was that SLCs at OCS hold students more accountable for their learning. Holding students more accountable appears to result in increased motivation to do well, more responsible behavior, and greater

pride in accomplishment. The findings indicated that 84.06% of parents perceived their child as displaying more pride in his or her work, 71.012% witnessed their child conducting more self-evaluations in regards to their schoolwork, and 37.68% of parents felt their child was more motivated academically as a result of SLCs. One of the best ways for academic accountability to be instilled in students is through academic discussions that are centered on their schoolwork (Benson & Barnett, 2005). Stiggins (2005) states students perform better academically when they are motivated and LeBlanc (2000) note that students also take on more responsibility for their academic outcomes as a result of SLCs.

Recommendations for Policy, Practice, and Further Research

Recommendations for policy. The OCS principal, in addition to the teachers, was curious about the parent perspective regarding their current SLC format. Following the research findings and conclusions, a recommendation for future policy would be to expand SLCs school wide. Parent responses indicated that they view SLCs as a positive addition to the academic program. The students showed greater accountability for their learning and parents were given more academic insight, which they perceive as beneficial for their children. In addition, it is recommended that OCS administration periodically evaluate their SLC process to ensure all teachers understand the expectations as well as guidelines for individual class implementation in order to continue maximizing the results. The SLC process is noted as providing many benefits, however, the results might vary across grade levels and from class to class. Consequently, it is

essential for teachers to constantly evaluate as well to make sure classroom results are being achieved. Although SLCs provide an opportunity for parents to know what to work on with their child, it is essential for teachers to take on an active role and help the child to set new goals, which will help to further academic advancement (Hubert, 1989).

Recommendations for practice. In order to ensure efficiency, the first recommendation would be to have grade levels collaborate prior to conducting conferences. The SLC format should look the same in each class to alleviate parental questioning as to why the process or information covered varies depending on the teacher. In school, classes in the same grade level are required to cover the same material in the same amount of time. Consequently, if each class is following the same structured pacing plan, the student-led conferences in same grade level should cover the same information, only the student results would vary. This would be important if a child had to change teachers in the middle of the year. The parents could be confident of a smooth transition in regards to conference execution, or if a teacher had to leave the school, it would be easy for a colleague to train a new teacher. In addition, academic data should be evaluated across grade levels to ensure the successful coverage of academic information across the grade level, which is shared during the student-led conference. Grade level results affect school results. As a result, plans for improvement should be strategically planned for continued student-led conference success. Student-led conferences are aimed to positively influence students' academic results and data help to recognize success in world of

academics. Many parents choose schools according to the academic attributes and the success of such which is provided through academic data (Bauch, 1988; Krausharr, 1972).

Further research. When thinking about the possibilities for further research on the topic of SLCs, the researcher would caution the use of the word “greater” in quantitative research statements. For example: “You have greater depth of communication with your child in regards to school work as a result of SLCs.” When given a choice, one might answer “undecided” because he or she feels as though he or she has always had in depth communication with his or her child. However, if one asks whether the SLC supports his or her communication, the change in wording might result in a more concrete answer.

When considering topics for future research, a study could be conducted on ways that SLCs support academic learning and compare the support given and received at SLCs compared to a traditional parent-teacher conference. This would be important because some teachers might prefer the traditional parent-teacher conferencing format. By reviewing data, those teachers could include students in the conference while incorporating some of the ways SLCs support academic learning into a traditional format. Brandt (as cited in Gismondi, 2009), enjoyed the traditional conferencing style, however, she felt she was not providing the parents with all of the information they needed. Parents want to be involved in their child’s learning process (Hackman, 1997), but at times need to be shown the way.

Another study could be conducted by comparing students' grades prior to participation in SLCs and after SLCs in order to note the effectiveness of the process. It would be important to do a comparison of grades prior to student-led conferencing and after student-led conferencing so areas in which improvement were made could be easily identified, confirming that the conference was indeed effective. In addition, adjustments in future implementations could be made in order to address those areas in which a positive change was not seen. Lewis (2006) noted that with continued support success can be attained at a higher rate with SLCs.

One could also research elementary school student perceptions of SLCs as to the influence elementary students perceive that SLCs have on their academic endeavors. A question that arose frequently in the current study addressed the influence SLCs have on a student's motivation. As a result, another valid future study could be conducted using students as subjects and determining the effects SLCs have had on their academic motivation. Stiggins (2005) states that students work harder and perform better academically when they are motivated, and SLCs encourage students to become motivated in their learning process (Guyton, 1989). In this study parents stated that the students were more motivated as a result of SLCs. However, students have yet to be asked in a formal research study.

Student-led conferences incorporating technology might be another interesting study. A previous study was conducted with kindergarten students in the Ralston Public School District in which they used power point presentations

to implement SLCs. Information was recorded for parents regardless of the student's reading level. To continue on the road of technology it might be interesting to discover other ways technology could be used within the SLC format. For example video conferencing could be used for parents who are not able to physically be at the school site or for handicapped students so they do not have to travel from station to station. Bailey and Guskey (2001) suggest that many areas could be better represented through technology. For example, videotapes of student performances in physical education, technical classes, or music could be presented better in an electronic format rather than in paper form. With today's technology students could share samples of their digital stories, power point presentations, web pages, and blogs in an individual computerized portfolio. In addition, with the majority of students using technology, a digital portfolio might increase their excitement and make the process even more relevant.

Chapter Summary

This study on the perceptions held by parents of children attending OCS found five main findings:

1. Parents at OCS deem SLCs as a beneficial component implemented at the school.
2. The number one benefit according to parents was an increase in student's self-pride, in addition to parents perceiving SLCs as helping students understand their academic achievements as well as the importance of self-evaluation.

3. Academic discussions that take place regarding school as a result of SLCs have a positive effect on parental expectations as well as parenting style.
4. Parents at OCS saw excitement and motivation as synonymous and as a result of their excitement and motivation children gain an extraordinary amount of pride, which increases their leadership skills and has a positive effect on their achievement and performance.
5. The pride students gained was a key element influencing their academic performance, motivation and achievement.

Three conclusions resulted from this study:

1. SLCs at OCS provide an opportunity for greater communication among students, parents, and teachers regarding students' learning and achievement;
2. SLCs provide a means for OCS parents to take a more active role in their children's learning process. As a result of participating in SLCs, parents are more likely to understand the academic needs of their children, know what to expect from them academically, and know how to support their learning.
3. SLCs at OCS hold students more accountable for their learning. Holding students more accountable appears to result in increased motivation to do well, more responsible behavior, and greater pride in accomplishment.

This chapter highlighted a total of 12 recommendations, including three policy recommendations: (a) expand the SLCs school wide, (b) conduct periodic evaluation of the SLC process and efficiency, and (c) teacher evaluations to identify individual classroom results. There were four recommendations for practice: (a) grade level collaborations prior to implementation, (b) continue to evaluate success rate and results, (c) evaluate academic data school wide, and (d) plan for future improvement as needed. In addition there were five recommendations for further research: (a) review research statements to make sure the wording is not a deterrent, always phrase a statement from a positive perspective; (b) compare parental support given at and prior to a SLC as compared to a traditional conference; (c) compare academic achievement prior to and following a SLC; (d) research elementary students perspectives on the SLC process; and (e) research the influence SLCs have had on a student's motivation from the student's perspective.

The educational system in the United States is currently in an era where change is needed and being sought out by the government, school districts, administration, teachers, and parents. Peterson (2005) states that the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 was executed in the hopes of closing the achievement gap by 2014. The year 2014 is quickly approaching and as of date the achievement gap still exists. The academic gap amongst students is substantial and it will take many steps to close it. SLCs as they exist today were pioneered by Little and Allan (1989), and since their first implementation the results have been positive. They include many of the characteristics research says is needed

in order for students to experience academic achievement. Learning First Alliance (2003) states that student accountability and school accountability must go hand in hand in order for schools to achieve. SLCs provide a technique for acquiring student achievement and school accountability. Benson and Barnett (2005) state that parents need to become active participants in the learning process; SLCs provide this. Marzano (2003) reveals that communication, an increase in parental expectations, and motivation are all key components for academic success. These too are provided through the implementation of SLCs. The educational system continues to change and so should some of our school techniques. Prior to the 1930s parents were causally informed about their child's academics through a coincidental meeting at the grocery store or post office. In 1932 at Liberty School in Highland Park Michigan began holding formal parent-teacher conferences to report student progress to parents. This was a change. According to Cutright (1947) by 1946 an entire district in Minneapolis, Minnesota had decided to experiment with the parent-teacher conferencing format and slowly other districts started to incorporate the parent-teacher format into their schools. These were changes. Forty-five years later, maybe it is time for another change. Districts have gone through changes and so have teachers; maybe it is time for students to go through a change and become active participants in the conferencing process by way of student-led conferencing.

There are only 3 years left before the initial proposed year of 2014 to close the achievement gap. Success has been noted in many schools that have

decided to make the change; maybe student-led conferencing is the change for which the educational system has been waiting.

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APPENDIX A

Revised Student-led Conference Parent Survey

What is your child's current grade level? _____

How many student-led conferences have you participated in with this child? _____

This survey is to determine parents' perceptions in regards to the benefits provided by student-led conferences. Please read each question/statement carefully and rate the effectiveness by circling your response. Your response will range from 5-1 using the following guide. The survey consists of 12 statements.

- Circle 5 if you strongly agree with the statement
- Circle 4 if you agree with the statement
- Circle 3 if you don't have an opinion about the statement
- Circle 2 if you disagree with the statement
- Circle 1 if you strongly disagree with the statement

Upon completion of this survey please place in the attached envelope, seal it and return to the classroom teacher. If you have more than one child please complete a separate survey for each child with whom you have participated in student-led conferences.

Your participation is greatly appreciated.

1. I have a greater communication with my child in regards to school work as a result of student-led conferencing.

5	4	3	2	1
strongly agree	agree	undecided	disagree	strongly disagree

2. Student-led conferencing encourages my attendance at conferences.

5	4	3	2	1
strongly agree	agree	undecided	disagree	strongly disagree

3. Student-led conferencing helps my child understand the importance of self-evaluation.

5	4	3	2	1
strongly agree	agree	undecided	disagree	strongly disagree

4. Student-led conferencing helps my child understand the importance of good work habits (completing work, listening to directions etc.).

5	4	3	2	1
strongly agree	agree	undecided	disagree	strongly disagree

5. Student-led conferencing helps my child in understanding their academic achievements.

5	4	3	2	1
strongly agree	agree	undecided	disagree	strongly disagree

6. Student-led conferencing helps to provide my child with clearer expectations.

5	4	3	2	1
strongly agree	agree	undecided	disagree	strongly disagree

7. Student-led conferencing helps my child gain greater self-pride in their work.

5	4	3	2	1
strongly agree	agree	undecided	disagree	strongly disagree

8. Student-led conferencing encourages honesty in my child when reporting academic results to me.

5	4	3	2	1
strongly agree	agree	undecided	disagree	strongly disagree

9. My child's organizational skills have increased as a result of student-led conferences.

5	4	3	2	1
strongly agree	agree	undecided	disagree	strongly disagree

10. My child displays more motivation as a result of student-led conferences.

5	4	3	2	1
strongly agree	agree	undecided	disagree	strongly disagree

11. I see an improvement in my child's leadership skills as a result of student-led conferencing.

5	4	3	2	1
strongly agree	agree	undecided	disagree	strongly disagree

12. Student-led conferences help me to become more aware of my child's academic progress and areas in which my child needs to improve.

5	4	3	2	1
strongly agree	agree	undecided	disagree	strongly disagree

Thank you for completing this survey.

Angele' Foster King
Angele.Foster-King@pepperdine.edu
Pepperdine University
ELAP Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX B

Student-led Conference Parent Questionnaire

Dear parents,

This questionnaire is being provided in an effort to determine parents' perceptions of how student-led conferences have influenced, if at all, your academic communication with your child, parental expectations, parenting style as well as student motivation and student accountability. Please provide as detailed response as possible.

1. How, if at all, have student-led conferences have influenced your child's achievement and performance?

2. How, if at all, have student-led conferences have influenced your parental expectations?

3. How, if at all, have student-led conferences influenced your parenting style when dealing with issues related to your child's academic performance in school?

4. How, if at all, have student-led conferences influenced communication about school between you and your child?

5. How, if at all, have student-led conferences influenced student motivation at school?

6. How, if at all, have student-led conferences influenced your child's accountability in regards to their academic outcomes at school?

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

Angele' Foster King
Angele.Foster-King@pepperdine.edu
Pepperdine University
ELAP Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX C

Possible Follow-Up Questions

Dear Parents,

Thank you for taking time out to complete the attached survey and questionnaire. I value your responses. Occasionally after analyzing participant's responses there is a need for the researcher to ask for clarification in order to receive the most benefit from the response given. In an instance like that it would be helpful if the researcher could contact the participant for further questioning. If you would be willing to participate in a follow-up interview please provide your name, number and the best time to reach you.

Possible follow-up interview questions might be:

Possible Follow-up Interview Questions

1. Please explain further your response to question #x.
2. What did you mean specifically by your response to question #x?
3. Please give an example of what you meant by your response to question #x.

APPENDIX D

Principal's Permission Request to Conduct Study

8533 Candlewood Street
Chino, California 91708
September 1, 2010

Mr. Keith Lucas, Principal
Ontario Christian School
1907 South Euclid Avenue
Ontario, California 91762

Dear Mr. Lucas:

As a doctoral student at Pepperdine University, and in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctoral in Education Leadership and Policy, I am writing to obtain your permission to conduct a research study at Ontario Christian School. I will be investigating elementary parent perceptions of student-led conferences in relation to the proposed benefits of student-led conferencing in addition to the influence student-led conferences have on communication about school, parental expectations, parenting style, student's academic performance, student motivation and student accountability.

The parent survey and questionnaire have been developed based on my review of literature. I am requesting that the surveys and questionnaires be distributed only to the teachers who have students with parents who have participated in student-led conferences. Parents will complete and return the surveys and questionnaires to the classroom teacher. Participation in this study is voluntary and confidentiality will be maintained. Participants are free to withdraw their consent and discontinue participation at any time. A copy of the informed consent and interview protocol are attached for your file.

Thank you for your time and consideration on this research proposal. If you have any questions regarding this study you may contact me at 213-304-3814. If you have any additional questions or concerns regarding this study you may contact the researcher's supervisor Dr. Linda Purrington at 949-223-2568 or linda.purrington@pepperdine.edu.

Please sign and return the attached approval form at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

Angele' Foster King
Angele.Foster-King@pepperdine.edu
Pepperdine University
ELAP Program Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX E

Professional Practitioner Student-led Conference Survey and Questionnaire
Feedback

- 1a. Were the directions for completing the survey clear? _____
- 1b. Were the directions for completing the questionnaire clear? _____
- 2a. Were the statements easy to understand? _____
- 2b. Were the questions easy to understand? _____
- 3a. In your opinion were the benefits of student-led conferences identified in the statements used on the survey?
- _____
- _____
- 3b. Were the questions used in the questionnaire effective for eliciting parent perceptions in regards to the influences of student-led conferences?
- _____

- 4a. How much time do you think it will take to complete this
survey? _____ questionnaire _____
- 5a. Do you have any suggestions for adding to the effectiveness of the
survey? _____

- 5b. Do you have any suggestions for adding to the effectiveness of the
questionnaire? _____

6. Please use the space provided for additional comments or suggestions.

APPENDIX F

Pilot Student-led Conference Survey and Questionnaire Feedback

- 1a. Were the directions for completing the survey clear? _____
- 1b. Were the directions for completing the questionnaire clear? _____

- 2a. Were the statements easy to understand? _____
- 2b. Were the questions easy to understand? _____

- 3. Was it clear that you would fill out a separate survey and
questionnaire for each of your children with whom you participated in
student-led conferences? _____

- 4a. In your opinion were the benefits of student-led conferences identified
in the statements used on the survey? _____
- 4b. Were the questions used in the questionnaire effective for eliciting
parent perceptions in regards to the influences of student-led
conferences? _____

- 5a. Do you think it will take you more than 20 minutes to complete this
survey and questionnaire _____

5b. Do you think that the survey and questionnaire will elicit the responses needed to receive a thorough sampling of parent perceptions of student-led conferences? _____

APPENDIX G

Parent Thank You

Label for the Parent Thank You

Dear Parent,

Thank you for participating in my doctoral
study on student-led conferencing.

Sincerely,

Parent Token of Appreciation



APPENDIX H

Student Thank You Gift

Religious Sticker Assortment



APPENDIX I

Principal's Signed Permission to Conduct Study

Your signature indicates that you have read and understood the information provided and you are willing to have your parents participate in the study. In addition you willingly agree to have your staff assist me in data collection for this study and you have received a copy of this form.

I hereby consent to have my school, Ontario Christian, participate in the research described.

School

Address

Principal's Signature

Please Print Principal's Name

Date

APPENDIX J

Letter to Classroom Teachers

Pepperdine University
West Los Angeles Campus
6100 Center Drive
Los Angeles, California 90045
September X, 2010

Ontario Christian School
1907 South Euclid Avenue
Ontario, California 91762

Dear 1st through 4th Grade Classroom Teachers:

As a doctoral student at Pepperdine University, and in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctoral in Education Leadership and Policy, I am writing to inform you that I will be conducting a research study at Ontario Christian School with the approval of your principal, Mr. Keith Lucas. I will be investigating elementary parent perceptions of student-led conferences in relation to the proposed benefits, if any, of student-led conferencing. In addition to the influence student-led conferences have on communication about school, parental expectations, parenting style, student's academic performance, student motivation and student accountability. Parents with student-led conference experience prior to the 2010-2011 academic year are being sought.

I look forward to the opportunity to conduct research at Ontario Christian School and I am requesting minimal assistance. Around the last week in October, I will deliver a set of parent surveys and questionnaires to Mr. Lucas for each classroom teacher in grades 1st - 4th, along with tokens of appreciation for parents and students. Mr. Lucas will give the items to you and I am asking that you send the packets home with your students. As they are returned, give each student a thank you token for him/her and their parent. Please return the completed packets to the office in the box labeled Student-led Conferences.

Your assistance is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Angele' Foster King
Angele.Foster-King@pepperdine.edu
Pepperdine University
ELAP Program Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX K

DRAFT Principal's Follow Up Letter

8533 Candlewood Street
Chino, California 91708
October XX, 2010

Mr. Keith Lucas, Principal
Ontario Christian School
1907 South Euclid Avenue
Ontario, California 91762

Dear Mr. Lucas:

On Monday, November XX, 2010 I will deliver the surveys and questionnaires to you for distribution to the teachers of students who have parents who have participated in student-led conferences. Each student with a parent who has participated in student-led conferences prior to the 2010-2011 academic year will receive one packet to take home. In addition, I will provide you with envelopes for completed packets and the tokens of appreciation for the parents and students. Parents with multiple students will complete one packet per student.

Parents will complete the survey and questionnaire and return them in a sealed envelope to the classroom teacher. Tokens of appreciation will be passed out by the teachers to the students and parents for completing and returning the packets. Teachers will be asked to return the completed packets to the office and place them in the box located on the secretary's desk. I will pick up completed packets once a day through November, XX, 2010. Reporting of the results will be by group analysis and individual parents or students identities will be kept confidential. Parent participation is voluntary and a completed survey indicates informed consent to include their responses within the group.

Thank you for your permission to conduct this research at your school. Your assistance is appreciated. If you have any additional questions you may contact me at 213-304-3814.

Sincerely,
Angele' Foster King
Angele.Foster-King@pepperdine.edu
Pepperdine University
ELAP Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX L

Principal Thank You

8533 Candlewood Street
Chino, California 91708
November XX, 2010

Mr. Keith Lucas, Principal
Ontario Christian School
1907 South Euclid Avenue
Ontario, California 91762

Dear Mr. Lucas:

Thank you for the opportunity to conduct research at your school. Your assistance throughout the process was appreciated. Your staff and parents were extremely cooperative as a result of your committed leadership. I consider myself fortunate to have had the opportunity to work with someone who is as dedicated as you. I wish you and Ontario Christian continued success in your endeavors.

Sincerely,

Angele' Foster King
Angele.Foster-King@pepperdine.edu
Pepperdine University
ELAP Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX M

Initial Student-led Conference Parent Survey

How many years has your child/children attended Ontario Christian School? ____

What grade is your child/children in? _____

How many student-led conferences have you participated in? _____

This survey is to determine parents' perceptions in regards to the benefits provided by student-led conferences. Please read each question/statement carefully and rate the effectiveness by circling your response. Your response will range from 1-5 using the following guide.

- Circle 5 if you strongly agree with the statement
- Circle 4 if you agree with the question or statement
- Circle 3 if you don't have an opinion about the statement
- Circle 2 if you disagree with the statement
- Circle 1 if you strongly disagree with the statement

Upon completion of this survey please place in the attached envelope, seal it and return to the classroom teacher.

Your participation is greatly appreciated.

1. I have a greater depth of communication with my child in regards to school work as a result of student-led conferencing.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

2. Student-led conferencing helps to increase the home school communication.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

3. Student-led conferencing encourages my attendance at conferences.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

4. Student-led conferencing helps my child understand the importance of self-evaluation.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

5. Student-led conferencing helps my child understand the importance of good work habits (completing work, listening to directions etc.)

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

6. Student-led conferencing helps to provide my child with clearer expectations.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

8. Student-led conferencing helps my child gain greater self-pride in their work.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

9. My child's organization skills have increased as a result of student-led conferencing.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

10. My child displays more motivation as a result of student-led conferencing.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

11. I see an improvement in my child's leadership skills as a result of student-led conferencing.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

12. Student-led conferences encourage honesty in my child when reporting academic results to me.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

13. Student-led conferencing helps my child in understanding their academic achievements.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

14. My attendance improved as a result of student-led conferences.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

15. Student-led conferences help you to become more aware of your child's academic progress.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

16. Student-led conferencing allows you to understand academic areas in which your child needs to improve.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

APPENDIX N

Parent Informed Consent Letter

Dear Parent:

My name is Angele' Foster King, and I am a student in Educational Leadership and Policy at Pepperdine University, who is currently in the process of recruiting individuals for my study entitled, "*Student-led Conferences: Perceptions Held by Parents of Children Attending a Christian Elementary School*". The professor supervising my work is Dr. Linda Purrington. The study is designed to inform the work at Ontario Christian School (OCS) related to elementary student-led conferences in grades kindergarten through third grade during the 2009-2010 school years, by exploring OCS elementary parent perceptions regarding the benefits, if any, of student-led conferences. In addition, the study is designed to explore parent perceptions about how, if at all, student-led conferences have influenced parent awareness of K-3rd student academic performance in content areas, communication between parents and students in regards to school, parental expectations and parenting style, as well as the influence student-led conferencing has had on student motivation and accountability. As a result I am inviting parents of current 1st through 4th grade students who participated in student-led conferencing with their child during the 2009-2010 school years to participate in my study. Please understand that your participation in my study is strictly voluntary. The following is a description of what your study participation entails, the terms for participating in the study, and a discussion of your rights as a study participant. Please read this information carefully before deciding whether or not you wish to participate.

If you should decide to participate in the study, you will be asked to complete one survey and one questionnaire. It should take approximately 10 minutes to complete the survey and the questionnaire. Please complete one survey and one questionnaire for each child that brings one home. Upon completion place them in the envelope provided, seal it, and return the packet to the classroom teacher.

There are no potential risks that you should consider before deciding to participate in this study. The potential benefit for participating in the study is to help administration evaluate the process of implementing student-led conferences which have been conducted by approximately 40% of the elementary teachers at Ontario Christian School.

If you should decide to participate and find you are not interested in completing the survey in its entirety, you have the right to discontinue at any point without being questioned about your decision. You also do not have to answer any of the statements on the survey or questions on the questionnaire that you prefer not to answer--just leave such items blank. Upon completion and return of the packets a small token of appreciation will be given to you and your child.

If the findings of the study are presented to professional audiences or published, no information that identifies you personally will be released. The data will be kept in a secure manner for at least three years at which time the data will be destroyed.

If you have any questions regarding the information that I have provided above, please do not hesitate to contact me at the address and phone number provided below. If you have further questions or do not feel I have adequately addressed your concerns, please contact my academic chair, Dr. Linda Purrington at Linda.Purrington@pepperdine.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, contact Dr. Douglas Leigh, Chairperson of the American Psychological Association for conducting research with human participants, Pepperdine University, at doug.leigh@pepperdine.edu or 310-568-2389

By completing the survey and returning it to me, you are acknowledging that you have read and understand what your study participation entails, and are consenting to participate in the study.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information, and I hope you decide to complete the survey and questionnaire. You are welcome to a brief summary of the study findings in about 1 year. If you decide you are interested in receiving the summary, please email me at:

Angele.Foster-King@pepperdine.edu

Sincerely,

Angele' Foster King
ELAP Doctoral Candidate
Pepperdine University
6100 Center Drive
Los Angeles, California 90045
310-568-5600